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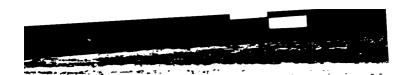
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THE MINOR CANON

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THE MINOR CANON

BY

G. BERESFORD FITZGERALD, F.S.A.

AUTHOR OF

"BEYOND THESE DREAMS," "A FLEETING SHOW,"

"THE STIGMA," "AN ODD CAREER," ETC.

"There is an earnest longing
In those who onward gaze,
Looking with weary patience
Towards the coming days.

There is a deeper longing,
More sad, more strong, more keen,
Those know it who look backward,
And yearn for what has been."

London

DIGBY, LONG & CO.

18 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, E.C.

THE MINOR CANON

CHAPTER I

THE winter in England had set in very late in the New Year, but it had arrived at last with unmistakable vigour and icy tenacity. Twenty degrees of frost had been registered in that county which, from its fenlands and Hollandish canals, always heralds, with cruel precision, the pastime of the rich and the shivering endurance of the poor.

In Lincolnshire skating was at its zenith, and, while hunting men from the Midlands went sulkily back to club life in London, the young and healthy who had no stables full of horses, traversed the lakes and shot across the meres.

In Kensal town, this cruel evening, the snow was noiselessly falling in huge, remorseless flakes, until the narrow pavement was almost hidden from sight. The roofs of the houses were already mere masses of dazzling snow, lighted up by the great flaring lights of the butchers' shops on a Saturday night, in which the crowd of snow-clad women sought for the odds and ends which were to mark for them the Christianity of the day of resurrection.

All of them looked tired and worn, and wet and cold. Some of them looked furious. ·like wild beasts at war with all the world, and seeking quarrels in the high Cockney accent. Some of them looked near the end, on whom pain and squalor and disease had set their ineffaceable marks. The struggle to exist brought them out on the streets on this snowy, bitter night in February; but it was easy to see the neighbouring cemetery would be a welcome haven of rest; the peaceful sleep they had long forgotten, the absence of hourly care, and hopeless poverty, the ended ache, in the heart of those who had known better days, as to the why and the wherefore.

The night was such a terrible one that the streets soon became deserted. The public-houses and the gin-palaces were no doubt crowded, as the sound of music, the harp and the violin, made manifest, even on these bridal-clad roads and pavements. Later on, the drunkards and the revellers would issue out, the snow would soon be contaminated, and another sunless morning rise on a part of London, which, containing much poverty, is nevertheless included, for the most part, under the satisfactory heading of respectability.

Hurrying round a corner from the main street came a tall woman whose form, clad though it was in garments of the shabbiest and least substantial pattern, yet seemed, even in her walk and lithe, almost graceful, figure, to speak eloquently of a departed past. She had a parcel in her hand, and her face was almost hidden in the woollen "wrap" drawn round her mouth. She looked, as to age, about twenty, but the London years are hard to reckon in the poor and she might have been much

younger. She had reached a shabby door, and opened it with a furtive glance behind her. She had come home, and it was a home on the way to heaven, though of the most earthly and sordid conditions, when attained to by three narrow, dirty, boarded flights of stairs.

Though a small fire was burning in the grate on this Arctic night, the room did not feel in the least warmed; draughts crept through the ill-hung windows, of which there were two. Unnecessary ventilation poured under the door, whenever the lodgers went in and out, from the bottom of the staircase.

Laura Ramsay deposited her small bargains on the one table in the ill-furnished, squalid room which, with all its meagre and tell-tale aspect of poverty, was yet scrupulously clean. Here, at all events, was respectability struggling against adversity. Our Saviour once said in a famous sentence which, to the superficial, might appear unsympathetic, that the poor are always with us. Alas! always with us, but not all

dwelling in such absolute cleanliness of outward surroundings as Laura Ramsay.

Before she began the Spartan crust of bread and cheese and took once more to the bed, where bright dreams, as she thought, would never visit her again, she crept on tip-toe to a corner where, breathing very peacefully in calm and innocent sleep, lay a little girl in her tiny bed.

Though the room was desolate and bare, this childish couch was surrounded with homemade curtains, and invested with a refinement which seemed almost out of place. The young woman drew the curtain very gently aside. To most people the sleep of infancy has somehow a pathetic influence. It is so akin to the longer sleep, at the sight of which our weary tears are still a memory of the past. It is so like the angelic promise of perfect peace, and again, to another type of mind, so full of mystery as to future possibilities.

Laura bent with infinite fondness over her sleeping girl, a child of about four years of age. "My sweet Rose," she said with a

faint, wan smile, "we shall get on better by-and-by. I must live and work on for you." But Rose slept peacefully on the dainty pillow her mother had made for her before she arrived on this earthly scene.

Soon worn out with her day's labour, and feeling the sewing machine in the corner of the room was an impossibility for her tonight, Laura herself, having locked her door and taken a final look out on the dreary night and the huge snowflakes still descending on the muffled city, slept close to the cot of her child; and the flickering shadows cast by the dying embers of the cinders in the little grate died out at last, leaving everything in absolute darkness.

Among the mountains and the valleys, within sound of the silvery bells of the parish church, when the cuckoo comes to herald the spring, and the village gossips watch the early cricket on the green, such children as Rose are known as "love children."

But, in the peerage, or even in the baronetage, in heraldic moments, great personages have been more decorously described by "a bar sinister," and many sons, in quite as humble circumstances as those of this child, on this winter's night in Kensal town, have risen to great positions, though their father's coat, perforce, devolved on them "within a bordure," and their mother's pedigree remained unregistered in the College of Arms.

After all, on such a night, in such a city as London, in such a world, the daily roof is a thing to thank God for as much as the daily bread.

CHAPTER II

MRS FITZHERBERT had none of the advantages of her famous namesake, none of the beauty now, never any of the wit, none of the Royal admiration. She had long been the widow of a South American emigrant, a cadet of a noble family, who had secured a very fair fortune in those halcyon days, when the fleeces of sheep were mysteriously converted into bullion.

Mrs FitzHerbert's ancestors were obscure, and, with decorous sobriety, were rarely alluded to. On the other hand, she had been a beauty in her early years, and this was an ever-recurrent theme, both before her children, of whom she had two, and in the presence of intimates, and even strangers. So also was the assertion that she had been married at sixteen, which could alone account for the fact of so young a woman being the

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mother of a son of twenty-three and a daughter of eighteen years of age. And yet, to tell the honest truth, she did not really look so very young, for her golden hair, plaited in the bygone chignon fashion, was undoubtedly imported from some neighbouring perruquier; her cheeks were tinted, artificially perhaps, but certainly without much art, and her smile suggested an enamel which did not come from Limoges.

Such ladies as these have, as a curious fact, always married before they were seventeen; they not, unusually, are the happy possessors of mysterious annuities, and they may be, for general purposes, included under the heading of the great lady's reply, as to the religion of her intended chef, "Point de principes, s'il vous platt."

The want of principle embraced the usual absolute ignorance of the value of money, and the positive delight in spending it. In her husband's lifetime she wasted thousands, and at last worried him, by her extravagance and her recklessness, into a comparatively early grave. The result was, of course, that

she now was a needy and a somewhat unhappy woman, the pleasures for which she cared being, at last, absolutely out of her reach.

With a very meagre education, she had muddled through life somehow, struggling to get into society in London and Paris, always failing to do so, still vain of her appearance, still convinced that she had been ill-used in life, absolutely selfish, crude, and even vulgar in manner and thought, with the airs and graces of a would-be Ninon de L'Enclos. And yet, such is the variety of our marvellous humanity that even Mrs FitzHerbert had done some good in the world—at least, so the onlookers said. Her son Philip and her daughter Ellen were strikingly beautiful, both physically and mentally.

Philip had now left Balliol, where his career had been one long series of triumphs, and had taken holy orders. Tall and slim, with large grey eyes, and a peculiarly broad head covered with black curls, with a fine, grave voice and a charmingly sociable and natural manner, Philip FitzHerbert possessed

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a host of friends, and was certain of success and professional advancement. Some of his friends regretted his choice of profession. But others thought that his conception of life was so serious, that his broad and eloquent view of religion, in its modern phase, was so likely to be of great benefit to the Established Church, and to the congregation who came under his influence, that they congratulated him on the better part he had chosen in holding aloof from the other learned professions and the prospects they undoubtedly afforded him.

How came it that Mrs FitzHerbert had brought such a son into the world? To do her justice, she sometimes wondered herself. He had been a dutiful and a good son, he still endeavoured to treat her as a spoiled child, and to save her expense had been his steadfast object for years. But there could be no sympathy between them. There was an impassable gulf fixed, which the noblest Christianity failed to bridge over. She never understood him, and, alas! he understood her only too well. Still, he

never forgot she was his mother, though he often laughed at her whims, her vanity, her absolute lack of judgment and tact. But it was the laugh of good nature, even if there was a ring of melancholy hidden away.

He was only fourteen when his father died. so, with such a silly mother, he had early learned to be self-reliant and sometimes almost stern. That no restraint had ever been placed on his early manhood, either at Harrow or Balliol, or when he spent his vacations, as he often did, in his mother's tiny house in Mayfair, need not be said. When he won the Craven Scholarship, and came home, she became almost hysterical. incoherent, and, as she thought, quite Biblical. "Ah, Philip, you will be rich some day; you will distinguish yourself. But I grow poorer every year. How true it is we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain I shall leave very little behind."

Philip had much humour, and smiled at the unconscious paraphrase, but he also inwardly sighed. He could do for himself, but it was hard on Ellen, whom he loved with that tender devotion so often existing between an only brother and sister—existing until the end, unless marred by some evil intervention or some graceless and unworthy marriage.

Poor Ellen, he thought, has no choice. Most of the men she meets are not fit for her. They cannot understand her, nor she them.

Ellen was a tall, pretty girl, with rather an insignificant manner, an arch smile, and delightfully smooth, sunny hair over a broad forehead, and merry blue eyes. She was an artist of decided talent, and had painted in Florence, and also in Paris, at the best studios.

The question arose again, how could such a mother as Mrs FitzHerbert have brought an artist into the world, even if she really had married at the age of sixteen? When they were living abroad, and she sometimes escorted Ellen to the picture galleries, she was bored to death, and scarcely concealed the boredom, beneath suppressed yawns, her invariable

criticism on all pictures being conveyed in the somewhat bald formula of "How it does stand out."

Again, Ellen was, on a variety of subjects, a complete enthusiast, and—extraordinary thought—she was the daughter of a mother who did not know what enthusiasm meant, and certainly would have failed to spell it.

In early years, when their father died, it was a deplorable fact that brother and sister realised that their mother was a person with whom they had but little in common, whose worldliness and frank, outspoken failure in what they had somehow learned to be the guiding principles of life often caused them a humorous astonishment. At last they combined. They realised fully their duty to their mother. As they grew older they saw the pathos of the extravagance and the social ambition of the poor old woman, and they plotted, in silence, to humour her, to help to keep the establishment afloat, to treat her as a spoiled child, and as one outside the ordinary and conventional restrictions of life which prevail in the homes of most persons of common sense.

The burthen, as years went on, weighed. doubtless, most heavily on Ellen, of whom her mother frequently averred, "She never has had the brilliancy I might have expected in my daughter, and she has never been sympathetic with me." Yet Ellen sold her paintings, and dressed herself with the proceeds, and often and often, in fact, habitually, stifled her own feelings and tastes, acquiesced in everything she disliked, called with her mother on persons whom she absolutely despised, and met, with what philosophy she could, the miserable subterfuges from which she tried to save her mother when debts of all kinds threatened to overwhelm them all.

It was much easier for Philip. To begin with, he was generally away from home. He was commencing a great career. He was surrounded with a host of congenial and sympathetic friends, he had the solace of libraries and a club, and he had the liberty which to Ellen was always wanting, as the

only daughter of a selfish and oppressive mother.

When he announced to her his determination to take holy orders, it was her evident astonishment and absolute confusion of mind which brought tears of amusement to her son's handsome eyes. "To think of you, Philip, as a clergyman!"

Reflecting afterwards, in the solitude of her chamber, on many vicissitudes in her own life, those chances and changes which she had so systematically neglected ignored, those still more mysterious memories of incidents of which, she complacently reflected, there could be but few contemporaneous witnesses alive, she came to the conclusion that the fact of her only son being a clergyman would very possibly be a social advantage to herself. It would be an eminently respectable fact, and in her heart of hearts, when the world was asleep and the nightlight fizzled out in the early. morn, as she lay awake, she mentally confessed that respectability had not been her pre-eminent distinction.

The sun rose up, on a spring morning, even in the London sky, and Mrs Fitz-Herbert sighed. Once it had been so difficult to look at these things seriously. Of course, she had always gone to church on Sunday mornings, to the later service, not, as the West Country term went in old days, as a "mēāns," but as a rope, attached to the Sunday bathing-machine. But Philip no doubt would become a famous clergyman, hereafter a bishop, and, if he did not marry, she would entertain the rural deans at the rectory.

She had no humour, or she could not have suggested herself as a possible hostess of rural deans, a class of clergymen, who, as she explained to Ellen, were, she believed, newly ordained young men in country parishes. Afterwards, making researches among hidden documents in the muniment room in Chapel Street, she discovered, as she announced at luncheon, that among her mother's French relations one had certainly been Bishop of Dijon. This made her perfectly happy. "But, of course, he must

have been a Roman Catholic," she explained to Ellen, who agreed with her. "Not that it makes any difference, I think," she concluded proudly, "but evidently Philip inherits his tendency from my family."

CHAPTER III

PHILIP FITZHERBERT had been one of the most promising of the brilliant pupils of a brilliant tutor at Oxford—one of the immortals who had stamped his influence on the young men who sat around his chair, and, in a certain sense, had influenced the destinies of England. It will be well remembered by those who had the privilege of that great man's instruction and guidance, especially before he became the master of his college, how wonderful and suggestive were the lectures he gave on the various great religions of the Oriental world. To them crowded the undergraduates of many other colleges beside his own, learning, perhaps for the first time in their lives. about the fine moralities of the various creeds taught by Buddha, Confucius, and even Mohammed.

In after years, Philip often decided that he never would have been a clergyman if he had had a religious mother or a tutor at Oxford who had not taken the very broadest and most liberal view of theology and faith.

His mother, with consistent flippancy, felt that to be present at his ordination would involve too great a stress of emotion for her to endure, without what is vulgarly described as "giving way," but she was determined, as, to his consternation, she assured both her children, after a family dinner in Chapel Street, to hear his first sermon.

"I can never forget Millais' picture," she said, with slight inconsequence, "and I must hear your first sermon."

He shrugged his shoulders and patted hers, which were always in the evening in great evidence. "First sermons are seldom interesting, I should think," he said, smiling.

"I do not in the least agree with you," replied his mother, controversially. "Everything new and young, at all events to me, is



interesting. I only dislike what is old, what is worn out and stale."

But she was not destined to criticise her son's earliest essay in the pulpit. She was ill in London when, on a lovely May morning, Philip FitzHerbert walked through the rectory garden at Stoke towards the steepled church, which reminded one of Hursley and Keble. It was buried in the country—this ancient Norman church—remote from any critics or intellectual cynics, hidden away among the woods of Charnwood, a church presided over by one of those meek and holy and unambitious men who are still the salt of the Church of England, and who had known Philip from childhood.

Ellen, of course, was there. She was staying at the rectory; but the congregation to whom Philip addressed his short view of a text from the Bible were mostly yokels, dull followers of the plough, worthy farmers of the Midlands, whose sons sometimes followed the hounds, the intellect of the congregation being represented by Doctor

Lawley, whose drugs were drastically familiar to them all, and Mr Sparkes, the village schoolmaster, whose dignity never failed him even under the most trying circumstances.

Philip, as he mounted what had once been the inartistic "three decker," so often represented in Staffordshire china, looked around him without excitement, but at least he had not to face the maternal critic, the lady with the glittering hair and the pink complexion, with the long-handled *pince-nez* and the fixed smile of complacency.

Imagine Mrs FitzHerbert in an Early Norman church, and your fancy will never soar further. Well, he was spared all that mortification, and simple as his words were to be, he felt sure they would reach willing hearts. That was the gift which befriended him so greatly as life went on—his self-confidence, without which few men succeed in life, and certainly not orators, either in the pulpit or in politics.

They were finishing the last verses of a fine old Lutheran hymn, in which Philip found positive pleasure, and they sang in a gallery erected by some early Caroline divine, in which a diminutive representation of Nebuchadnezzar's Band had every Sunday, in halcyon days of yore, performed an inharmonious concert.

The tombs of the dead lay around the young preacher, crying indeed in the wilderness, but with all the fervour, enthusiasm and hope of the great Baptist. They were the dead of an extinct and noble race whose collateral lives, in a singularly effeminate branch, had produced a family historian who, with a cloudy alienation of feeling, had endeavoured to depict their faded glories. Philip remembered the beautiful tombs, and was quite familiar with the unbeautiful book. But the "Amen" aroused him to the occasion, and his dreams vanished.

"The greatest of these is charity." This was his well-worn text, and it may be forgiven him if, with all his scholarship and originality of mind, he failed to strike a novel spark. He lived to be quite certain of his present theme, to realise personally in a way he could never have even guessed

at then that, when faith and hope were fading away, there yet might remain the greatest grace of all. His polished phrases, coined in a mind of culture and taste, and uttered in the fine musical voice which was an inheritance from the father whom he scarcely remembered, came, after fifteen minutes, to a conclusion. The Hallelujah Chorus was played in the finest village style, and the rustics clattered down the aisle.

Brevity was the soul at Stoke of the farmers' wit, and they approved of the stranger's discourse, not quite indeed in the vein of the Northern farmer, which has become obsolete, but in the intelligent approval of the "short view." Doctor Lawley had always connected charity in the text with the plate which he habitually carried round the church on the regulated occasions.

"It was a charity sermon," he said with some sarcasm over the domestic joint half an hour later, "but without any reference to our charities."

So Philip made his first plunge in the

somewhat chilly bath of clericalism, and afterwards thought inwardly of many strange experiences in his early life, and of his mother who, he felt sure, ill as she was, or thought herself to be, would be wondering how he had acquitted himself.

Ellen came up through the perfumed garden to greet him with the fond smile which he remembered from early childhood. The rooks were cawing in the fine old elm trees near the churchyard, the warm southerly breeze crept up over the verdant meadows, breathing the perfume of myriads of sweet-scented wild flowers; everything seemed calm and peaceful and serene in this world so noted for change and chance.

Ellen held out her little gloved hands. "Bravo, Philip! but you were so didactic. These poor old women are quite bewildered. If you had told them to be kind and patient, they would have understood you. But charitable! Phil, what could you have been thinking of?"

It was not, indeed, quite apparent. His fine eyes seemed far away over the low, dis-

tant hills, veiled in the mist of a warm day after weeks of rain and damp. These two had always been everything in the world to Ellen said each other. no more, but watched him rather pathetically. "Had he really," she mentally wondered, "chosen a profession for which he was suited?" He had always been a little mysterious, even with her, and no doubt that reticence was to many an attraction. But she would have liked him to unbosom himself absolutely, to tell her exactly, and utterly without reserve, what he thought, what he wished, what he had done. It is those who love us most to whom this is always an aspiration. Our friends and our acquaintances are not, as a rule, unselfish enough to wish to pierce the veil.

He understood Ellen well enough, and suddenly averting his eyes from the horizon, which was in the London direction, he put his arm round her waist in almost lover-like fashion, and he kissed her cheek.

"You are wondering, Nelly, if I shall be the square man in the round hole. I do not think so. I am ambitious, and I ought to be able to advance myself, and then the world is so sad, that to spend one's professional life in attempts to ameliorate its conditions must, one would think, secure a fairly happy life, as well as a useful one."

There was a cut-and-dried tone of the essayist which did not elude Ellen's ears. It rather grated on them.

"It is too early," she said, laughing, "to assume the latest clerical manner. I am dying of hunger. Please let us go in to luncheon. Many people profess hunger on Sundays, and others wonder why."

CHAPTER IV

In an unpublished letter of great interest, which George Eliot wrote after she had finished the writing of *Middlemarch*, she thus expresses herself:—

"I am going now to bathe my mind in deep waters, going to read Mr Lewes's manuscript, which has been storing itself up for me, and to take up various studies, which have been to sleep since. I have found my strength hardly enough for *Middlemarch*. I easily sink into mere absorption of what other minds have done, and should like a whole life for that alone."

This was exactly the view of Philip Fitz-Herbert in the early days of his new career. He required, with hopeless greediness, that he should have two lives, one for his work and his advancement in life, and the other for

that absorption in the work of others of which Mrs Lewes so eloquently speaks.

The modern clergyman, like the modern bishop, is a man of action, of committee meetings, of a thousand and one practical duties, preaching here, and lecturing there, travelling weekly many long distances, writing hundreds of letters, constantly attending meetings of innumerable boards of lunacy, of charity, of rescue, of missionary, of temperance societies. There is none of the dignity of repose for him. As a well-known divine somewhat arrogantly declared, "Let me wear out if you please, but do not let me rust out."

Clearly, such a life as this leaves no time for George Eliot's absorption, and Philip found it necessary to stand a little aside from the dust and clatter of the clerical fray, and to keep a part of his life for study and the records of the ages, for consideration of the thoughts and works of those literary noblemen who have wrought and left behind them so much for the consolation of the future generations. And then there was the total

absence of sympathy and congenial society in the neighbourhood of Stoke which, in a man of Philip's mould, produced depression, and a failure of that looking forward, so necessary in youth, for any degree of happiness or effort.

If Ellen could have lived with him, the handsome curate felt he could long have endured his present isolation. The poor women in the red brick cottages of this Midland village delighted in him, and eagerly expected his visits. When their children were sick, he was very tender, very gentle, very assiduous. When the neighbouring squires came home sleepy and worn out, to dinner from the hunting-field, he did his best to rouse them by the results of his accurate perusal of the Times, which remained unread in their spacious libraries. He was modern enough to drink their port, and afterwards smoke his own cigarettes, which came from Bond Street. Sometimes he flirted, in a very mild manner, with the young ladies of the county, played tennis, and even cricket, began to grow fat, and apt,

in summer-time, to sit in an easy-chair under the mulberry tree.

If the famous Oxford tutor who had prophesied such a great future for him at the Bar, in the House, in the Colonies, could have seen him at this time he must have groaned. But the church bells tinkled on.

"There is a funeral to-morrow, sir, at two o'clock," said Doctor Lawley, who was the natural authority on such events.

"Polly is going to be married to-morrow at 11.30," said Mr Sparkes, who took a great interest in one of his favourites, whom he had known from infancy, and "The twins have to be baptised to-morrow," said the local grocer's wife.

All these duties were, of course, attended to with absolute punctiliousness by Philip. But where did the interest come in? He was practically his own master, a position which has been held by the wise to be one of inestimable advantage. He was curate in charge at Stoke, and there seemed a probability, if he exercised the proverbial patience, that he might ultimately be presented himself to the

benefice, as the vicar had fallen into evil health, and the lay patron was well-disposed towards Philip. But the absence of interest was appalling, though he was the kind of man who never gives in, never confesses himself beaten.

"I chose the profession," he argued with himself, "deliberately, and of my own free will. It is the noblest of all, and I will never give it up." To do him justice, in after years he never did of his own accord. But Ellen, who eagerly read his weekly letters, soon understood that the monotony of his life was paralysing his intellect. up your mind," she wrote, " to to London. Here the literary clergyman has his full scope; he is not confined and pent into narrow circles and poor grooves of attenuated thought. A curacy in the West End of London is what should be your present search. You will meet all your old college friends, all your Harrow contemporaries, all your University Club acquaintances." She did not add, being a girl of some discretion, "and you will find some pre-eminently charming girl, who will consent to be your wife and your delightful companion for many years of life." She did not know that he decided London for reasons of his own, though she knew he had avoided, in the first instance, settling there on account of their mother. She did not know that he had long dreaded that he never would marry, and, if she had known it, would have laughed to scorn, in her merry way, the resolution so often made and so invariably broken.

The winter had set in once more, and Philip certainly looked aged and weary as he sat in his solitary study in the rectory at Stoke. It was a luxurious house of its kind for a young man in his position to occupy. There were excellent prints of obsolete divines, there was comfortable furniture in abundance of the early Victorian period. A famous Bishop of Peterborough beamed upon him on one side of the fireplace, and William Wilberforce, on the other, seemed to be in the act of freeing slaves and ruining West Indian proprietors simultaneously.

There were bookcases whose contents, it

must be confessed, did not appeal to him, for they were stuffed with the performances of the early Evangelical School, which, excellent as they really are, do not interest the young intellectual clergyman of the present day, fresh from Balliol College. Philip had not read Scott's Commentary, or Horne's Introduction, or Davenant on the Colossians; but they were all there at hand if he wanted literature. His thoughts seemed somehow to turn in another direction to-night. His dear sister's letter lay opened beside him. He had put his thin, delicate, long-fingered hand to his head as if he felt pain in some retrospective suggestion.

"Yes," at last he said to himself, "I suppose she is right; I must go to London, where only I can get the additions to the professional life I have adopted, where only I can feel I am not simply a cleric, but a human being, full of insatiable interest in all the speculations and mysteries of human life."

The Curfew bell, still ringing at Stoke on Saturday nights, warned him of the approaching Sabbath and the duties it entailed, in which,

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notwithstanding his depression, he still took a great interest. But the sound of the bell, tolling over the long, silent village street, the graveyard, where so many blank-lived yokels slept, the water meadows, almost ghastly beneath a white wintry full moon, made for melancholy. He never betrayed his inner self to anyone, but he looked, at that instant, like the man of despair.

CHAPTER V

LADY ANN VAIN was the only daughter of that famous Minister of Georgian times, who was, at one period, the most unpopular man in Great Britain.

Lying for half a century in the magnificent mausoleum which he constructed for himself, his character and his influence have long justified the well-known sneer of the Roman, "ut declamatio fias."

His only daughter inherited some of his genius, and being the child of his old age, by a second marriage, still survived after fifty years of pre-eminence in the great world of London. She had, of course, in this long and interesting career, known everyone of importance in the century, and had seen, as she often said at her famous Sunday luncheon parties in these latter days, the

most marvellous social changes which the world has ever known. Yet the versatility of her intellect was such that she had, in company with the great statesman of imperial times, watched with acute interest the changing scenes of the modern democracy, and adapted herself to them so far as she thought it desirable to do so. But as the modern years went on, and all that she had known and respected in the social distinctions was gradually disappearing before the eyes which still sparkled with humour, and dazzled with a not yet extinct coquetry, as the vulgarity of wealth from the various quarters of new countries attained to an ascendancy against which, in her opinion, a court and an aristocracy should at least have made a protest and a stand, Lady Ann Vain learned to mix in the altered society of her order, and established the last salon of the century in her beautiful house in Mayfair, where art and literature, music and painting, poetry and history, sent all their votaries to mingle together among beautiful actresses, free-thinking savants, and charitable founders of every sect and cult under the sun.

Lady Ann's great day of rendezvous was Sunday, and her luncheon parties were, to those who had the distinction of being invited to them, a recollection which remained. But to her honour be it also remembered that the poor and the struggling man or woman of talent was also sure of her help and sympathy. In fact, the interest of her life had long been in this discovery of the disappointed and unappreciated, provided they possessed talent in any direction, and the many successful and illustrious men of letters, who frequented her house, were always ready to inquire, to search out with great pains, and, for her sake, to ascertain the worthiness of those she wished to benefit.

"The worthiness!" she said once to the second poet of the age, with her sweet smile. "Since I emerged from that modern pandemonium, which the Hebrews deem society, I am inclined to think I have left all the unworthiness behind me."

The poet laughed. "Lady Ann, you will always be enthusiastic, and invent goodness where it cannot be found."

She turned to another neighbour, the Hibernian historian who sat by her at luncheon. "No poet should ever dream of a place where no goodness exists. There were great qualities in the worst of Dante's enemies."

Lady Ann Vain did not much care for the country in her old age. Unlike the famous Duchess of Somerset of another century, she clung to the town, and spent two-thirds of her year among the bricks and mortar of Mayfair. Still, in the summer and autumn, she visited the fine place her only brother had left her in the Midland counties, and she had written a book describing the history of the Jacobean house, which now had so little part in the whirl and interest of modern life, but which had once sheltered those who had hated the name of Cromwell and rejoiced in the sufferings of their neighbour Bunyan.

Lady Ann's house was within a few miles

of a village called Gamblegay, which, as her ladyship sometimes laughingly said, suggested, elusively indeed, such charming summer surroundings for those of her friends who spent their winters at Monte Carlo.

"You must come to Stratham this summer, and spend a week with me," she said to the famous opera composer, Signor Pandori, whose weakness was the tables, combined with the music of the Principality. "I shall take you over to Gamblegay. But there is no high play there, and our Corneili road is terribly flat and prosaic. If you could only be inspired by Bedfordshire, how proud and happy I should be!" And Signor Pandori, who did not understand, but knew that musicians went to Stratham and returned in sleek delight, opened his broad Italian mouth, and showed his fine rows of white, glistening teeth.

"The signora is too gracious," he murmured. Such, in the briefest manner told, were, and had been for many years, the surroundings of this Quixotic lady, who, knowing the world so thoroughly, and from the mere fact of her great age so near to quitting it, still found its charm in the conversation and artistic performances of the cleverest men and women of her day, including the politicians and the diplomats of the older world.

But Lady Ann had once been the mother of an only daughter, to whom all the devotion of an earlier period of her life had been unreservedly given. She had never had a son, and naturally her ambitions, in early life, had been centred on a young girl whose distinguished beauty and fine presence are still remembered by an elderly generation.

Mr Vain had died early, and his married career had justified the censorious observations of the world when the famous Prime Minister's daughter had decided, in opposition to all her friends and relations, to marry a wealthy and good-looking young man of a north country family, on whose estate extensive iron-works had recently been erected. As Lady Ann observed long after-

wards, "My father and I are like those birds who only lay one egg every year. The species grows rarer and rarer, some day it becomes extinct, and museums call out for specimens. The great 'Auk' has much in common with our noblest races. He does not survive because he is not the fittest. Who is the fittest? The London sparrow, I suppose, and Mr Smith, the village grocer at Stratham, the happy father of twelve children."

Her theory was unhappily justified in the marriage of her only child, Miss Dorothy Vain, who, wedding a Norfolk baronet, had no family. Lady Dent, a lady of fashion and no special development of cardiac ambition, was quite content to have no children. Her husband was equally content, having a dislike to anything which entailed trouble, or anxiety, or expense.

Lady Dent had no reverence for the memory of her grandfather, the famous Prime Minister, and no regret that his title had disappeared. She was not historical, much less antiquarian. She took life as it

came, performed her country duties without any failure and with perfect salubrity of mind. She and her husband took exactly the same view, and watched the partridges and the turnips, and the farms, and the tenants, and even the family pictures, without any undue excess of feeling.

They came up to their London house almost the same day every year in May, they rode together in Rotten Row without exchanging a word, they had given the same evening party for many years, where there was always modern music and incessant conversation.

The wonderful fact remains that these two excellent representatives of the earliest couple, in the earliest of gardens, had one rooted prejudice. They could not get on with Lady Ann. She had always found her daughter dull, but she had done her best, for many years, to cure her of that incurable disease. The only daughter of one of the cleverest women of her day, the only grand-daughter of one of the most remarkable of statesmen—no one sang her virtues, as

many did, without admitting that she was rather silent and uninteresting. Into such a world as that which surrounded her mother nowadays it was impossible for Dorothy Dent to enter.

From the somewhat abundant throat and chest came the complaining voice of London Society. "Of course I see dear mother directly I come to London, but she has really become too Bohemian for Sir George and me. Her society amuses her, which is, after all, at her age, the great point. But we don't care for her sort of people."

Lady Ann once said to the second poet of the age, apropos of relations in England, "From sons-in-law, of course, if one has any experience of life, one expects nothing. They owe you a grudge; I don't say why. But a clever Frenchwoman at the Tuileries once said to me at dinner, 'My friends are my lovers, my acquaintances are my friends, my relations are my foes.' It really is very true," smiled Lady Ann.

As they walked home together, the poet

and the editor of a leading newspaper, crossing Piccadilly, the latter observed, "That is epigrammatic on the part of Lady Ann. It is almost worthy of Chamfort."

CHAPTER VI

SEVERAL years had passed away since that wintry night in Kensal town, when Laura Ramsay came home to find her child asleep, and to strengthen her resolutions to fight her way in the world, not indeed for herself, but for Rose, who should be soundly educated, and brought up, by dint of her dauntless exertions, to be a better woman than she herself had been. And these rosolutions had been kept, under merciless conditions, in frequent ill-health, with constant self-denial, often hungry, always weary, always chaste and faithful to her determination, still more wonderful, remaining a humble, penitent, Christian woman.

And whatever the explanation might be and I do not presume to suggest one—Laura Ramsay had undoubtedly prospered. She still lived in London, but held a responsible post in one of the best-known and most fashionable dressmaker's shops in London, with a salary which enabled her to live in tolerable comfort herself and to send Rose to a school which was, perhaps, somewhat socially above the girl's position. In addition to this, Laura's voice, which had always been naturally a lovely mezzo-soprano, had been cultivated of late, when she had found money to spare on a master, and latterly she had sung at concerts in the outskirts of London when her work for the day was over.

Many kind friends had come to the rescue long ago, many acquaintances had latterly taken an interest in her talent for singing and in the honourable, struggling life which they had ascertained she had so independently lived for so many years. She still retained very good looks, and a widow, as she was supposed to be, with great vocal talents and in a position of trust with a good salary, naturally became interesting to those who came across her, either in commerce or music.

She was very grateful to everybody, she

was almost unnecessarily humble, but she had no confidants. Her history remained her own, and of her "husband" she never spoke, not even to Rose, who had sometimes questioned her about her father, but always with the same result—"he is dead."

Proposals of marriage would undoubtedly have come to her; they sometimes seemed imminent. But there was a coldness in her manner, and a sternness, in the presence of any male advance, which at once checked any matrimonial intention. Laura Ramsay had finished for the present with the male experience, and she was known in Madame Gabrielle's shop and in the suburban musical circles as Madame Villeneuve.

Some of us live many lives, and Laura, though unconscious of the fact, lived certainly two. One was the life to herself, into which no human sympathy ever intruded, into which even her child's love never had a peep. That was a life with very little hope but that of Heaven in it. It was a life in which she sorrowfully meditated on the apparent injustices of this world, on the

successful hypocrisies, the cruel betrayals, the triumphs so often, here below, of evil, and the mystery which such evanescent prosperity must always suggest to the religious mind. The other life was the cheerful and the hopeful one for her daughter, and, connected with the main object for her energy, possibly even greater success than that she had already achieved.

She was not beyond the dreams of musical ambition, nor of increasing income, nor of the incense of praise and flattery, but it was not for herself. It would all be for Rose's benefit, for that bright, cheery and most excellent life which she hoped to secure for her daughter in the future.

She had now a tiny doll's-house abode in the neighbourhood of High Street, Kensington, and latterly had commenced, when her hours at the shop came to an end, which they did at an early hour of the evening, to give lessons herself in singing to humble, lower middle-class young ladies, who could only afford a small sum for the lessons which they coveted. It was now holiday time for the children, and Rose, rapidly growing into a very pretty girl with masses of light wavy hair hanging down her shoulders, and large, deep-set, thoughtful grey eyes, was at home with her mother.

The holidays were always a difficulty with Madame Villeneuve, as, being employed all day, she had to provide for the girl's care and amusement. Fortunately, Rose had friends at school, whose parents lived in London, and with whom she often spent the day, and there was an elderly servant. who had lived with mother and daughter now for some years, and who was devoted to Still, her mother was glad when Rose. evening came, and during the holidays she gave up all her music lessons. To-night, however, there was an excitement for both of them. Madame Villeneuve was to sing at a public concert at Kingston, and she was taking Rose with her to be one of the audience. It was the first time the daughter had heard her mother sing in public, and her excitement was naturally great.

The criticism of a more or less suburban

audience at a concert is not, as a rule, of a serious or very important character, and the local chronicle is apt to record the event in a very stereotyped fashion. It so happened, however, on this occasion that the concert, which had been arranged for a well-known county charity, was attended, from a considerable distance, by a large party collected at a country house, and which comprised some very well-known musical people, both professional and amateur.

It was well indeed, perhaps, that Madame Villeneuve was not aware of this, as it would undoubtedly have made her nervous. As she advanced to the front of the platform, in the mourning garments she always wore, and with her beautiful jet-black hair arranged with natural crimson roses, the audience looked with curiosity at this unknown lady, with her distinguished manner of moving and holding herself, who was ambitious enough to sing the "Jewel Song" from Faust.

Rose listened, with her bright young face almost scared, her lips half open, entranced with what she felt, rather than knew, was her mother's great talent. When she had finished there was for a moment a strange silence—the silence of surprise and delight. But almost directly the musical house party led the applause, which was so enthusiastic that, with a slight bow, she began again, and this time sang, "Angels ever bright and fair," and then, as if anxious, as she really was, to escape from the noise and the glare, she almost flitted off the platform.

Rose found she was crying herself, and, furtively wiping her eyes, stole round to meet her mother, with a view to catching the train back to London.

The concert was over when a lady, waiting for her omnibus to convey her large party back into the country, looked round and asked for Madame Villeneuve, who, at that moment, was emerging from the side door of the concert-room with Rose. The lady recognised her at once.

"I could not go," she said, "without thanking you for your great goodness to us in giving us such a treat. Please forgive

my presumption. Such a talent is for the world, and not for us only."

Madame Villeneuve coloured slightly, and thanking her, would have passed on, but the lady was importunate.

"And here," she said, "is a gentleman who is our guest, and who wishes to thank you himself. Signor Pandori wishes to thank you."

The great composer stepped forward and bowed profoundly. "I have been in a delightful land far away from the earth—among those angels. I shall do myself the honour to call upon you, if I may."

Laura realised at once what had happened. She had been singing before the great author of operas, and he proposed to call upon her. She gave him her card, and he carefully placed it in his pocket-book.

"I have to catch the train," she said, as, bowing again, she took Rose's arm and hurried towards the railway station. Rose even had heard of Pandori's name at school.

"Oh, mother," she said when they reached Kensington, "I never realised how you had learned to sing of late. How beautiful it was! You will make your fortune, and you will have to give up the shop."

Madame Villeneuve smiled a little sadly as she kissed the child and bade her goodnight.

"I daresay," she thought, "he will never call; Italians, I believe, are not sincere, and he only wished to be kind and encouraging to me. Yet I shall always remember that I once sang, without knowing it, before Pandori, and that he said he had been with the angels."

CHAPTER VII

Philip FitzHerbert left the country with a pang of regret, but of course he knew he was right. He knew the kind of cultured sociability, which was one of his chief characteristics, was utterly out of place in a village in the Midlands. Everything beckoned him to London, and he obeyed the summons, one of the strong attractions being that he could constantly see Ellen, and relieve her, to a certain extent, of the monotony of her life.

He found a curacy at a well-known proprietary chapel in the centre of London, under an incumbent with whom he had a long acquaintance, though only a superficial one.

Mr Stone was a well-known pulpit orator in London, he was also a poet and a writer

of magazine articles. His fine presence and supercilious manner carried conviction when he quoted Wordsworth and obscured the Decalogue. He was distinctly a product of modern times, almost socialistic in his secular view of man and matters, and though ostensibly a member of the Church of England, in creed probably, if the truth must be baldly stated, a sincere Unitarian.

To Philip, his wonderfully fine, broad scheme of life, his highly-strung imagination, his romantic view of men and women and things, his extraordinarily pure conception of everything around him, presented a charm and an influence which never failed. If there were mannerisms, if there was self-appreciation, and if there was disdain for the pettiness of life—and even his friends, including Philip, admitted all this—the greatness of his nature atoned for all.

It was impossible to know Mr Stone well and not to grow fond of him. The ladies adored him, but his chapel was chiefly filled with young and middle-aged men. Philip soon

found that their religious views widely diverged, but Mr Stone had no objection to that, and in his generous way gave Philip every opportunity to make his name famous, to distinguish himself, inviting him often to his house to dinner, where he met the circle of admirers, who were often very distinguished themselves, but who sat, so far as religion was concerned, at the feet of Mr Stone, whose influence was very similar to that of the late Doctor Martineau.

"Robert Browning, Philip, was on many points a narrow-minded man, especially where politics were concerned. In his later years he always refused to meet Gladstone, simply because he thought he had done his best to injure his country by his advocacy of Home Rule, and had also wrecked his party. His view may have been correct, and I, personally, am disposed to think it was. But what has a poet to do with all this? and why should anyone of ordinary culture refuse to meet a celebrated man at dinner, simply

because he disagrees with his opinions or actions? I meet many people, in my own small society, who execrate my religious views. who consider I have thrown my life away, and all the opportunities which They may be at one time it afforded. right, and I be quite wrong, but that is no reason for my not meeting my critics or enemies at a mutual friend's house. On the contrary, I may convert them, or at least display some qualities of manner which may convince them I am not utter Barbarian. Browning's view, latterly, was to avoid those with whom he disagreed, and most notably in the case of Gladstone."

"I think," said Philip, "that most poets are enthusiastic in their likes and dislikes, but you are an exception."

He was thinking of the Biblical phrase—"all things to all men," but he did not venture to quote it to his host. But Stone divined his thought.

"No," he said, "there is a plain distinction between narrow prejudice and a

latitude which must border on hypocrisy. Our great Master and example drew no lines in his society, and I defy anyone to show an instance where He avoided the society of any individual from dislike or distrust. He knew Judas well, his past and his future, and his personal attitude towards Himself, but He sat down to supper with him."

There was no doubt Mr Stone's influence became very considerable over his subordinate as time went on, and the influence, it may at once be said, was for good. He clearly understood Philip's character, though he did not know Philip's history. He guessed, however, at a good deal, and he knew well the sort of mother it had been Philip's misfortune to have.

"I understand him pretty well," he said to himself, "but there is a point beyond which I never get. There is something behind. I often wonder what it is. If I knew, I might help him."

But Philip never gave a sign. He re-

spected Mr Stone, but the man was not yet born to whom he would confide his soul, his inner self. To the slight nature, of course sympathy is a necessity, and so the "arcana" are revealed. The vulgar man always talks of himself and his belongings, and his income and his place. But a man like Philip passes of necessity and of intention through his life with a pale finger upon his lips.

One night, in the house in Harley Street, after a quiet dinner, Mr Stone revealed himself to Philip on one head, and perhaps expected reciprocity. The children were upstairs asleep, and as often happened to the widower of many years standing now, the "form of the beloved came to visit him once more."

"I think," he said most kindly, "Philip, you really ought to think of marrying. You are getting on in years, and you are made for the supreme happiness à deux. It belongs to human beings once to taste the serenity of sympathetic connubial bliss. The other blisses are very easy of attain-

ment and renewal; but I do not think a man of your fine nature and temperament, Philip, should miss in life the one great happiness which is within the grasp of most of us. I can assure you it only comes once."

He did not notice that Philip's face had frozen up and his expression become hard, like that of an aged man.

"I have no intention of marrying," he said. "The marriages around me for many years are not encouraging. And as for the situation occurring only once in a man's life, your clergyman, especially your Evangelical clergyman, marries as often as he has the opportunity."

Mr Stone glanced with curiosity at his guest.

"There are, of course," he said, "men and women who marry often, and for a variety of reasons. What I meant, and what I believe, is that there is no such thing as a second love. A man who has loved a woman with all his heart and soul—a physical, a sensual love, if you will—but, beyond that, a love of lost

self and total absorption, will never, never love again. The thing is impossible."

But Philip made no sign.

"I understand what you mean, but I think it depends upon the man's duality and nothing else."

The poet sighed. Then Philip did not understand love, perhaps he never would. That was his conclusion as the many clocks round Harley Street began to strike twelve. Philip walked home, choosing the quiet streets and avoiding Oxford Street. He was really very happy, and surrounded with kind and interested friends and acquaintances. His fame as a preacher was spreading far and wide. The dean, who wrote the illegible handwriting and whose sweet smile welcomed every young aspirant, had listened to him and approved. was clearly marked out for early promotion in his profession, and he was as popular in general society, outside the great world, as he was among those of his own cloth, whose jealousy or rivalry he disarmed by

his charming candour and simplicity of manner.

What more could be want? His means were ample for his position in life. Since he had left the country his morbid depression and sinister view of life had, in great measure, already departed, and doubtless would shortly vanish away. He felt happier, he felt stronger in his will, in his resolution, in his faith day by day. It was only when quite alone, when the day was done, and its work and its amusement over, when he said his prayers and listened for a moment ere he went to bed to the dull murmur of the London streets, when he thought that some day those blinds would remain still drawn, the curtain still be stretched across, to keep out the light, when the summer morning would break with no suggestion and no future for him, when, in a word, all would be over, the last dream vanished, and the last aspiration unfulfilled, that he asked himselfwhat then?—a canon or a dean, or even a bishop. Still, what then? His naked soul before the Creator who had made it. How

should he answer if there was someone to accuse, someone to say, "What have you done?" Still the poppied sleep came, and the phantom flitted, and Philip lived a good and a useful and an unselfish life. And we all try to believe this to be the best of all possible worlds.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS FITZHERBERT grew old, and as she grew old she became inexpressibly vexatious and tiresome to those who had to live with her. She had always been vain, silly and selfish. As old age came on, these disagreeable qualities developed, they became mellow. To the incessant love of pleasure and distraction, to the inexhaustible frivolity and the vulgar view of life, to the absolute inability to grasp the idea of self-denial, or of living on her income, or in any way of considering others, were now added the further horrors of a fretful, complaining nature.

Philip neglected her, she said; he scarcely ever came to see her. Success should not teach him to overlook the one, who (Heaven save the mark!) had always been ready to give up everything for him when he was a boy and a younger man. Now he ought to

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think of her, so pinched by narrow means. He ought to give her presents, he ought to provide her with comforts. She positively convinced herself that she, who had spent her children's fortune, who had surrendered everything a woman should hold dear to her own amusements and personal pleasures, whose bad reputation had greatly injured her daughter's future prospects, was a poor, neglected mother whose children, even Ellen — that unlucky slave — were grossly ungrateful to her.

The apostolic injunction, "not to be weary in well-doing," becomes sometimes an almost impossible one to realise. Anyhow, Ellen, patient and long-suffering as she was, sometimes gave way, and could have been found weeping bitterly in the loneliness of her own little London bedroom.

"I am ordered to be cheerful," said Mrs FitzHerbert, attired in a bright violet spangled costume, with a diamond crescent in her golden wig, and fingering a long-handled pince-nez, with a general glitter of sham Parisian jewellery, "and you see Ellen's

eyes. She has evidently been crying and moping, and of course all this makes me miserable myself."

It was to Philip she addressed her complaint one morning when he walked over to see her. He always tried to soothe her, for he had horrible early memories of violent passions and deplorable scenes.

"I wish," he said gently, "Ellen could come to me for a few days. The change would brighten her up."

"Of course, you will all leave me alone. What have I to expect now? I would have taken Ellen to the theatre to-night, but she says she does not care to go. I shall go without her, and ask a friend to take her place."

"I believe the change which would do you both good would be a week or two in the country, in this lovely spring weather. Let me help you to go, if you cannot really spare Ellen to me."

"The country!" almost screamed the rouged and bedizened old woman. "The country always kills me with its monotony,

the horrible, unhealthy cottages, and the village in which there is always measles. The trees make me so melancholy, waving to and fro in that monotonous manner, and then the neighbours, so narrow-minded, so intent on petty matters, parish teas and missionary meetings. I was born for great people and great places and great things. I love the immense, not the confined and the narrow."

Poor woman! If she could have only seen herself as everyone else saw her! The very plaits of her false chignon, even then out of fashion, were like the snakes of which Jeremy Taylor speaks in a fearful passage regarding the grave. Philip's heart sank within him.

"And the meadows," she said; "would you believe it, the last time we were in the country my maid told me they positively teemed with adders. It was not safe to go out of the paths. And we only got our letters once a day, and nobody called, and there were no invitations. No, Philip, not the country; Paris, if you like, but I am afraid we cannot afford it, and it is no use

going to Paris unless you are prepared to spend money. Next year, or the year after, I may be able to go and live in Paris if some of my speculations prosper. If only they would pay their dividends, and I could get on to Monte Carlo for the winter!"

Her son, accustomed as he was to her ravings, could stand her conversation no longer.

"Well, then, mother, good-bye. I hope you will enjoy the theatre. I shall see Ellen downstairs."

The interview had been in his mother's little drawing-room, and his sister came out to meet him as he descended. Their eyes met in the silent sympathy of old. How well they had long understood the situation, and how impossible it was to amend it!

As he expected, Ellen had purposely not gone upstairs. She was dressed to go out of doors, and she looked very white and wan as she kissed him with effusion, but her eyes sparkled as he said, "Let us go for a walk, Nell, in the Park."

It was the prettiest moment of the year

in London, when "April melts in Maytime"; the hyacinths were bursting into bloom in the beds near Grosvenor Gate, the foliage of the plane trees was exquisitely verdant, the bloom of the laburnum and the cherry tree in a late spring was yet scarcely over. It is true the breeze blew keenly from the east, but they both were too hardily bred to shrink from the English spring as they walked briskly along.

"Mother is worse than ever," said Philip.
"I wish I could have you to myself for a week or two."

"It is impossible. I can scarcely get away now to my studio, and I shall soon have to drop all my meetings and guilds. She is asking for me I daresay now. I can never be away for long."

He shook his head despondently.

"And about her affairs?" he asked.

"At any moment the crash may come. She is beset with creditors. Every morning bills arrive in shoals. She has no idea of the position she is in. I have paid everything I could out of my own pittance, but it is

but a drop in the ocean. She talks at the same moment of going abroad, and having a box at the opera, and of making a composition with her creditors."

It was such an old story. Philip looked up at the extremely beautiful sky, with its long white fleecy clouds, driven here and there by the boisterous winds of an English spring. It was the sky of Constable, and of infinite variety and interest. His sister turned towards him with great tenderness.

"We must not worry any more about her. I will do my duty to her to the last. But how about yourself? You are becoming celebrated. I see your name often in the newspapers. They tell me you are already one of the famous clergymen of London. I always go to hear you, as you know, whenever I can get away."

Philip was not vain. "One gradually begins to be known. One rises at last, emerging from the commonplace, but it takes a long time. I have intimations from a London patron that I am not much longer to remain a curate."

"And are you happy, Philip?"

There was a sweet diffidence in the sisterly voice which gave him pause.

"Is anyone ever really happy?" he rejoined. "But I take an interest in my life, and I am working hard. I am writing a book. I make a profound study of all the mysteries I encounter, and I try to be of use to the other gropers in life around me."

"And you must think soon of marriage, Philip, won't you?"

"You women," he said with some hardness, "always regard matrimony as the panacea. I can't imagine why. The best and the happiest men and women I have ever known have never been married."

She sighed, and the sigh suggested to his mind the conversation on the same subject with Stone a night or two ago. He was not a matchmaker, but it occurred to him Stone would fall in love with Ellen if he ever met her. She might do worse. He was clever, well off, an excellent philosopher and friend. He had declared himself no

more a lover. Philip was not sure that Ellen would not make a better wife to an attached widower with dutiful step-children than if she became the consort of some exacting, devoted and passionate adorer. It sounded a prosaic conclusion, but with all his pulpit eloquence and sympathy with the poor and suffering, his brilliant imagination and irrepressible enthusiasm, Philip had never been poetical in the routine of life. Stone the poet had long recognised that fact. He woke from his reverie.

"I am dreadfully silent," he apologised. "I will walk home with you. I see you are fretting, and feeling you ought to go back. One thing, I suppose, is an advantage to you now. The awful men mother used to ask to the house do not now come to see her. The rats have left the sinking ship. You know I can always supply you with money whenever you want it, but it must not go to her. These transactions are between me and you, Nellie."

He had handed her, as he said this, a little packet of sovereigns.

"How self-denying you are, Philip, for I know you are poor yourself, and you give yourself so few pleasures. But your prosperity is at hand. I venture to prophesy that the day is dawning for you."

She parted at the corner of the street with the brother to whom she had no likeness. "I shall see you on Sunday, at all events, in church," she smiled.

He grasped her little strong hand. How true, how strong, how brave this little woman was! And her prophecy came true much sooner than she herself believed to be possible.

The following day came a letter to Philip from one of the great landlords of London, offering him a newly-created district church in one of the most fashionable parts of London, which he had quite recently built himself, and endowed at his own expense. "It seems to me," wrote his lordship, "that this is the sort of sphere for which a youngish man of ability, with energy and moderate means, and a gentleman to boot, of good

education, is more especially suited, and I hope, therefore, you may see your way to accept my proposal. The vicarage house is only just finished, and I venture to think my architects are to be congratulated on its arrangements."

Philip thought it over, consulted Mr Stone, and wrote to announce his acceptance both to his lordship and to his own sister Ellen. The income, indeed, was likely to be swallowed up in salaries and out-goings of all sorts, but Philip was not a man to be deterred from accepting promotion, even if beset with initial difficulties.

"And then," as Stone characteristically observed, "you are in the centre of London fashion. You will be able to lash their vices, you will speak out, and eventually you will be listened to, and do good work."

The dean observed that he would have no poverty to deal with, but that still, in the winter, when his church would be comparatively empty, Philip might find time for the greater London interests, which we

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always have near us. After all, his Oxford friends thought, perhaps Fitz is cut out for a bishop, and will end by confirming our sons and marrying our daughters.

CHAPTER IX .

Pandori had lunched with Lady Ann. It was a warm Sunday afternoon in June. The great tenor was about to sing for the select audience, which included the well-known winner of that year's Derby, Miss Parneston the new novelist, the erratic clerk of the Privy Council, the second poet of the age, and Mdlle. Bianchi, of the Covent Garden ballet. Other interesting London habitués began to drop in.

Though nothing in this world would have induced her to admit the startling fact, Lady Ann Vain was really giving a Sunday concert, and all the London musical world, German and Italian, were coming at intervals to listen to the music. Still, there was no crowd, there was no heat. That delightful range of rooms, with its masses of flowers, and the huge conservatory, and the windows which the comparative silence of Sunday enabled

Lady Ann to open, were filled with a listening world, which was singularly silent, for the moment, as Signor Pandori began to sing. And yet it was not a fashionable world. The pioneers of Society were not there. They were never asked to be there. Lady Ann was hidden away behind the palms, conversing with the beautiful dancer until the singer began, and then she was instantly absorbed.

It is a wonderful mercy which enables an aged woman of eighty years to take an interest in everything worthy of consideration around her. It is, of course, partly the result of long habit, of early culture, of a sound physical and intellectual constitution. She was dressed, as always, in the rich gradations of black and grey, and pearls, and jet, which were in the fashion of her mother, but still made concession to modernity. Her beautiful white hair was gathered up under what appeared to male eyes a compromise between a cap and a Spanish mantilla. She was still unbent, but walked stiffly with the help of her tortoise-shell stick.

When the song ceased (it was the famous

tenor song in The Barber of Seville), a murmur of applause floated through all the rooms. Lady Ann, with a final word of sympathy to the danseuse, who was there for the first time, and to whom she therefore, as was her wont, had been paying particular attention, rose to join in the universal homage. But her lustrous eyes thanked him more than her conventional words.

"You have promised to come to Stratham for Whitsuntide. 'Remember,' as our great king said to Bishop Juxon; 'remember!'"

Lord Dovedale came up to join them. He was the "lion" of the day in certain circles, and his horse, "Follow On," was the greatest horse of the year; but Lord Dovedale moved in many kinds of society. Lady Ann was his godmother, and a Sunday afternoon spent in her society was surely appropriate. Besides, he was a devotee of music, and always had his box at the opera every season. He was, moreover, one of the largest church patrons in the kingdom, and owned one section of enormous London. When he had warmly complimented Pandori (who had won

"a monkey" over the race), he turned to his hostess.

"Lady Ann, I want you to go on Sunday to my new church, St Mary's. It is really well worth seeing, and I have just appointed the first parson, FitzHerbert, a very goodlooking, clever fellow. He is a gentleman too, and his father belonged to our county, and made a silly marriage ages ago. I think you would like to hear him. He is quite one of the coming preachers of the day, and exceedingly agreeable in society."

Lady Ann promised she would go on Sunday morning.

"Your promotions, Dovedale, are always judicious. My mother told me my father never made a bishop in his life. He always consulted his serious friends, and they were mostly of the Clapham sect. Now, I hear you are most tolerant."

"With me," said the great London landlord, "the best man will always win, but the difficulty is to find the best. However, Fitz-Herbert has no wife, so I have not to add her photograph to my large library screen down in the country, which is made up entirely of the photographs of clergymen's wives, sent by themselves when seeking their husbands' advancement."

"I should think," said Lady Ann, smiling, "it must be a very plain screen."

"Ecclesiastically plain. To be sincere, it is kept, as a rule, in the housekeeper's room; but when we have a clerical entertainment, and the bishop comes over, up comes the screen to the library."

Mdlle. Bianchi had crept up again near to her hostess. She wanted to say good-bye, and she did not see Lord Dovedale. She liked to hear about bishops, for she was a devout Catholic. His lordship turned and saw her.

"How do you do?" he said, in his most courteous manner, so different from the cheery, bluff style adapted for the paddock and the stand.

Mdlle. Bianchi smiled and bowed, and his lordship made his way to Miss Parneston, a lady of quite another type, and one of his own church, a Radical, with very serious

views, of which the latest exponent was her novel, World without End. Lord Dovedale was longing to read it, so he said. He thought of his famous patron's formula: "I shall lose no time in reading it."

An illustrious Oriental in his native picturesque costume had just arrived, and Lady Ann placed him in a chair of honour, and gathered some of the distinguished visitors, including the second poet, in a group around him.

"What a pity," she said to Dovedale, "that Mdlle. Bianchi has gone. She would have danced, and the Rajah would have enjoyed himself. He will not care for music, and even our poet, with his Eastern mystery, is evidently boring him."

"I shall have surprises for you yet, and your English public," Pandori was saying with unction. "Next season we shall come with someone," and he raised his eyes to the ceiling as if the mere thought of his future triumph deprived him of utterance. "But I am not an *impressario*, and I do not dare to prophesy."

"He is quite right, you know," said Lady Ann, "to talk like that. It excites curiosity, it floats a phantom in the air, it makes, too, for his own importance in the world. Poor man! I wonder if he has really heard of any future prima donna."

The poet sighed, as conventionality bids them do, especially the non Poet-Laureates.

"I thought these great musicians were jealous of each other's talents, not emulous to produce rivals on the stage."

"You must not, as a great artist, talk scandal about your brothers and sisters in another art," said Lady Ann, rather sharply. "Jealousy is the meanest of all vices, and incompatible with genuine artistic talent."

He bowed, unconvinced, of course, and wondering if, in her long acquaintance with artistes, she had really conscientiously arrived at this conclusion.

"She is a poet herself," he thought. "She idealises her world at eighty years of age. Truly, she is and always was a marvellous woman."

But Lady Ann once more had sat down

to listen by the side of the solemn Indian. A little old man stepped forward with a bow. He looked like one who might have entranced another generation, and who must, of necessity, regard strangely, and sing feebly, to this attentive modern company. Yet, when he began "Come into the Garden, Maud," in a voice which still remained the most bell-like tenor which was ever heard, his audience forgot his age and the weakness which left him only voice now for private rooms.

When the buzz of excitement had subsided—for this particular singer was scarcely ever heard now, and his reappearance was an event—Lady Ann said sadly to him, "When I hear you thus again, I remember, alas! I am here at the gate alone."

"Oh, madame!" he said with deprecation.

"But you do not know the gate I mean the gate which lets one out forever from this extremely pleasant world. I have outlived all my generation, so I stand by this gate alone."

He still failed to understand her ladyship's meaning, or, at least, chose to do so.

"The world does not care now for such simple love songs as that I have just sung. And Tennyson—do the English still care for him? or is he superseded?"

The second poet of the age listened with acute attention.

"So far, no one has approached him," she said cruelly; "he has taken his place among the immortals."

The period was one of peace, of luxury, of contemplation, of amusement. In a very few months there was to be a great change in everything. An enormous army was to leave these shores: and charitable bazaars and religious meetings consoled the volatile, while around them wept the bereaved—husbands for their first-born, wives for their husbands. sisters for their brothers, and lovers for their betrothed. The blazing crimson sunsets had no portent for the passers-by in that magnificent summer time, as they might have had in ancient days, and there were no nudge each other's elbows. augurs to Cassandra, indeed, had her say, but, as usual, no one attended to her ravings.

Lady Ann took a great interest in European politics, and constantly in conversation with the diplomatists of the world, she formed far-seeing and intelligent opinions. She had a few serious moments of conversation with the French Minister that very afternoon. His excellency was an esprit fort, and an intimate friend of Lady Ann's. After a long exposition on the situation, as it appeared to him, he shrugged his shoulders, and with a "qui sait?" walked with little steps down the beautiful staircase.

CHAPTER X

Pandori had kept his promise, and after a few days he called on Laura one Sunday afternoon in her little house in Kensington. He explained with great candour that he had found out that she was engaged on week days, and as he really wished to see her, he came on her one free day.

"But you must give up this employment. Music will not endure a rival. Everything must be boldly sacrificed to the cultivation of your voice. It is an investment;" and as to the results he would pledge his word.

Pandori himself became fascinated with her serious and attractive beauty; he helped her to make financial arrangements, which were at first rather difficult to settle, then he wrote letters to friends of his connected with the Conservatoire, and he advised her to go to Brussels and study hard. In addition to her own work, the education of Rose made the proposal attractive to her, and a sufficient income had been secured to her while her future remained uncertain. Pandori assured her she should return every penny he advanced.

"You shall repay me, and with five per cent. interest," said Signor Pandori. He himself was going to Italy, to sing at Milan during the winter, and he bade his pupil au revoir until the spring. "Madame," he said. "work hard, never distrust. nor despair, and still labour every day. Your success is a certainty if only you persevere. The greatest element of triumph is there, the divine instrument, but it is for you to study the method of using it and of thrilling the souls of thousands." He did not understand the sentiment, which the greatest of all modern prima donnas once privately wrote, "God still allows me to impress my hearers with something higher than the mere sound of a voice." but he was a musical devotee, and he was

as much interested in Madame Villeneuve's success as if she had been his own daughter; so he departed to his Southern quarters, full of hope for the lady's future.

So far as work went, no one could accuse Laura of any remissness. Her singing master was astonished at her long hours of practice, at her persistent study of the art to which she was now to devote her life. The musical authorities at Brussels were delighted. She sang before the heir to the throne. If she continued to progress at her present rate, the Conservatoire authorities prophesied her début Christmas at the Monnaie Theatre.

She had a very tiny apartment in the Quartier Léopold, close to the Boulevard, and Rose went backwards and forwards daily to a French school at the corner of the street. As her mother's talent daily improved, so did Rose's looks. She was at the age when physical charms develop in most ways, and her intelligence and vivacity deceived many as to her purely Saxon nationality.

The life of mother and daughter was at first a little dull. They had no money to spend on theatres or amusements. It was a life which called for constant self-denial, but it was also a life of hope, and, to some extent, of aspiration. Gradually, as the autumn went on, musical critics became friends, and tickets for concerts and theatres were showered upon them. The mother was so talented and the daughter was so pretty. This was the verdict of a small world, but one which, so far as music is concerned, is wonderfully judicious and enlightened.

Madame Villeneuve, for reasons of her own, had long since decided that, under no circumstances whatever, would she ever attempt to enter Society; not even if she became a famous singer and was besieged with invitations. Rose was still in reality only a child, so no question on this head arose for her. So far, however, as Madame Villeneuve could superficially discover, the passport to any respectable society in Brussels was to know none of the English, a fact

which, unflattering itself to the Briton, seemed to involve the sweeping unpopularity, for some reasons not specified, of the colony in the Quartier Louise.

Madame Lebroski, said to be the daughter of a world-famous pianist, and who was one of the first teachers in the city, had no hesitation in explaining to Laura that the English had a bad name because they were so very shifty in money matters, and had such strangely lax notions as to the payment of accounts.

"If you were to make your debut here," she explained, "under an English name, it would be most unfortunate for you. Luckily you have assumed a French one."

She was a lady whose hair was cut short, whose hat was that of the mariner on shore, whose dress was loud and short—a lady who incessantly smoked cigarettes and who had a daughter with yellow fuzzy hair like a negro's, only of a different shade. As to music, she was absolutely prejudiced. There was no music but German music, and she flatly contradicted Laura whenever she spoke

with enthusiasm of the great Italian masters. Her face, of enormous square dimensions, lighted up with a weird glance as she dilated on the beauties and the grandeur of Wagner, and those who remembered her father, with his benign smile and abominable morale, saw in Madame Lebroski his diluted successor.

But with all her hatred of England and the English, the spell which Laura involuntarily exercised on so many people with whom she was brought in contact fell also upon her, and she laboured with the others to assist in her work and her future the foreigner who had begun rather late in life to follow, with extraordinary talent, the profession which to the German Pole seemed far and away the noblest of all.

"It is music," she said once to her pupil, "which alone redeems the world. It is music which alone is welcome alike in the hour of pleasure and the epoch of grief. When all is commonplace and disheartening and oppressive, music steals in to exalt and to console. The ancients knew this when they

talked of Orpheus making the trees dance after him, and Christians realise it when they picture Heaven as a home of harmony." She said it all in her guttural German, but the ugly woman's face was illuminated by her conviction.

Looking back years afterwards, calmly, when life had altered in so many ways for her, Madame Villeneuve always remembered Lebroski with gratitude and pleasure.

Enthusiasm to the aspirant is the immortal tonic, and Laura drank deeply of it in her present precarious life.

Pandori wrote most kindly, but November was advancing, and no actual offer had been made to her for an engagement. She tried not to be impatient, and no woman had ever been taught in life more cruelly how to wait.

It was at this moment of her life that she suffered herself for once, when alone, to look back on the long dreary past, not really forgotten, but generally thrust away from her. She wondered was "he" alive, or had he passed away, like so many other shadows in this existence, towards some future incomprehensible state. She did not even know his real name, though she thought she would recognise him again even if a thousand years had passed. His real name, she long ago knew, had been purposely concealed from her, and a false one given. Her child had been born in Queen Charlotte's Hospital. But she once more brushed the memories away and sat down to her piano.

Her beautiful voice rang in trills and ripples of divine melody through the little house, and the awful and the sensual and the devilish vanished away. There came a visitor the next day, in the person of the great impressario, who, with many profound bows and a profusion of polite phrases, explained that he was a life-long acquaintance of Pandori's and many other of madame's greatest musical friends. He had heard madame sing in the great part of Catharine in L'Etoile de Nord-an opera which they proposed to revive at the Monnaie in January, and he suggested that she should make her debut in that opera.

There were many operas and many parts which Laura would have preferred, but she had not yet reached the happy position in which the prima donna can worry those around her into premature graves, and can change her mind and her costume simultaneously. She was in too precarious a condition to do anything but agree to the propositions She had no objections now made to her. to offer, but she humbly suggested that there were many parts she had studied far more than Catharine's, but added that she would devote the weeks which lay before her to this particular part. The terms he already offered to her seemed, in her self-depreciation and with her slender means, fabulously magnificent, and the next day the contract was joyously signed.

Lebroski, who was always sans gêne, inquired eagerly what the terms of her agreement were, and, with a slight shrug of her shoulders, approved.

"One must be facile at the commence-

ment. I shall go to hear you the first night. But I ask you to supper to-night at the Café Riche, to commemorate your engagement."

At the supper, to which Laura went, were gathered together the Bohemian musicians of Brussels, the world-famous violin player, whose head and body seemed somehow to be rolled into one, the famous contralto from the Scala, and the American prima donna, fresh from her triumphs at St Petersburg. Of young men with diamond studs, and long dark hair, and pronounced hips, there were, at least, four, who all gazed with languishing curiosity at Madame Villeneuve, of whom they had heard such astonishing rumours.

The supper was undeniably good, and the champagne excellent. Madame Lebroski understood perfectly how to provide the good things in life for her guests and friends, though she had but moderate and hardly-earned winnings to spend upon them.

She had given the supper, however, with serious intention for Madame Villeneuve's

benefit. Some of these men were musicians, but some also were musical critics, journalists, social gossips of note. They might all be of use to Laura. The women too might, hereafter, be jealous, even depreciatory, even malicious. At present they were only curious, stifled with an inquisitive spasm.

Laura, as usual, was calm, sociable, rather silent, and this mood, to the singers, was the most piquante of all moods, unaccustomed as they naturally were to any reserve, or reticence, or humility.

"Oh, these English!" they thought, "how cold, how repellent, how phlegmatic!"

Madame Lebroski charged their glasses. The wine had warmed her hospitable soul.

"À notre camerade," she said, "ma chère amie!"

It was very late when Laura found herself in her little bedroom, and she was somewhat weary after this unwonted festivity. But they were all very kind, and so sympathetic. How little these cheery Bohemians thought of what are called the serious things of life, and how these things constantly weighed her down in spirits and in hope. She glanced silently into Rose's room. She was breathing heavily in deep and happy slumber.

CHAPTER XI

THE financial crisis, so long anticipated by Philip and Ellen FitzHerbert, had come at last, and further residence in London, or even in England, became an impossibility for their mother. She escaped by the night mail, enveloped in garments of mystery, and attended by a maid who was too devoted to Ellen to ever desert the family, and arrived at Brussels in the dreary winter morning, to swell the crowd of the impecunious, and to add, by one more item, to the evil reputation of the fleeing Briton.

When she had been established in an exceedingly comfortable apartment in the Quartier Louise, whence she could enjoy the excitement of the continuous traffic of the tramcars rattling up to the park, and where the stout figures and crimson breeches and green coats of the non-militant generals,

cantering gaily up by the side of the tramcars, could conjure up visions of European bloodshed, and a new Waterloo. FitzHerbert at once declared she felt better, and that Brussels was far amusing than London. It was such a bracing place, it was such a gay spot, such a miniature of Paris. She proceeded at once to survey all her imitation laces. all her sham diamonds and Palais Royal sapphires, all her last year's bonnets, the toque purchased at Louise's and still unpaid for, the strings of Roman pearls, the massive coral diadem, the ancient shoes with paste buckles, and the aigrette sparkling with Oriental hypocrisy. In short, she once more evoked the paraphernalia of her class, and began to revive.

Ellen whose health, under constant anxiety and shame and apprehension, had began to fail, but who yet, with dauntless courage, did her filial duty, beheld these preparations with horror and distrust.

"Surely, mother," she said, "we ought to live carefully now, and try and make our small income keep us going quietly along. If we only," she said with a gasp, "could live within our means, how thankful and contented I should be!"

But Mrs FitzHerbert had escaped for the moment from the worry of her creditors, and her health improved, and her love of pleasure remained exactly what it had been half a century before.

"I feel," she said, "much younger since I saw the last of the white cliffs of England. I am going to enjoy the music of the winter here. I shall take a box at the opera for two nights every week during the season."

It would have been a comedy to the stranger looking on behind the scene, but to Ellen, bereft of all her interests, her charitable works, her literary friends, above all, the society of the brother who was all in all to her, the drama grew daily more terrible and more agonising to contemplate.

"She seems in better health," she wrote to Philip, "but she is as keen for excitement as ever, and the last thought which ever troubles her is the dishonesty of the life I am compelled to lead with her. Her creditors have no pity from her, and she is beginning the same reckless life here again without one pang of regret. Yet what, Philip, can I do? The moment I remonstrate I am overwhelmed with reproaches, and nothing I can say can influence her in the least. I sometimes think there ought to be public trustees to manage the affairs of persons who have never had any idea as to the value of money."

It was seldom that Ellen wrote from Brussels thus to her brother. She knew he was in the midst of a great professional struggle, of duty, and effort, and eloquence, and success. It was not for her, she meekly thought, to obtrude upon him her trivial cares, her daily self-denial, the unhappiness of her life. He could guess it all without a hint. He had already crippled himself by paying necessary and urgent debts of his mother's to enable her even to get out of England. She must struggle on, and unconsciously she adopted the resolution of one of the greatest characters in the Bible.

"Whatever happens to me," she thought, "he must increase in fame, in wealth, in the interests of life."

She had so long been accustomed to the third-rate entourage which it was her mother's peculiar talent to assemble, that she accepted it all once again, including the disreputable "man of good family," the lady who had left Samaria, and the gentleman whose club committee in London had waved to him a stern and decisive adieu.

Ellen was herself considered by such people dull and even second rate, with little to remind them, in her manner or habit of life, of her gay, spirituelle and delightful parent. It was a wonderful certificate of character, but she never, unfortunately, knew what the Brummagen view really was.

The excitement of her life came almost immediately to Mrs FitzHerbert in the opening of the opera season, and the box she had secured for herself.

"Fancy! Ellen," she exclaimed one morning, "we are to have a revival of L'Etoile de Nord, and there is a new

prima donna, a débutante, a Madame Villeneuve. I suppose she is a French woman."

Christmas came and passed away. Mrs FitzHerbert disliked all dates, feasts, or fasts, which reminded her of the fleeting years. She had no grand-children to come and visit her. Philip was, naturally, at such a season, detained in London, and Ellen had no motive or inclination for the gaiety, forced or natural, of Christmastide. Besides, in Brussels, it is the fête of St Nicholas which is the real moment for festivity and amusement, and not the old English Noël.

The great excitement came at last. The Monnaie opened with an opera of Massenet's, and Madame Villeneuve was advertised to appear the same week. Mrs FitzHerbert's first night was for the new singer's début and she went arrayed in all her artificial splendour, to sit in the most prominent place she could secure in her box, with a large bouquet of flowers before her; and Ellen in her simple toilette, shrouded partially by the curtain, sat behind her. The box was

a small one on the pit tier, and an Italian pianist occupied the third seat.

At first it was clear to the distinguished and attentive audience that Laura was nervous, and she received only the moderate applause which such a critical audience was generous enough to give. But this was only for a few minutes. Soon her angelic voice rose to its most beautiful notes, increasing in volume, in purity, in execution. Fine as was her acting, picturesque as was her appearance, the house forgot everything but the thrilling, bird-like warbling of the marvellous organ she possessed.

As Catharine ended her song, the enormous house echoed with applause, long continued, with waving of handkerchiefs and loud clapping of hands. The men rose in their boxes and shouted "Bravo" and "Encore." The pit positively roared in their ecstasy of excitement. At last Laura tasted the delight of public approval, and knew that she had succeeded in her first effort. She bowed again and again. She returned once more, still smiling and bowing. But the

audience was inexorable, the orchestra began to play, and, perforce, she sang again the latter part of the famous song as perfectly as she sang it at first.

When the great clamour gradually fell into an excited whisper of innumerable voices, Mrs FitzHerbert still sat gazing towards the deserted stage, on which the curtain had now fallen. Through her long pince-nez she still followed the echoes of the divine voice.

"That is an Englishwoman, Ellen. Where have I seen her before? Her face is so familiar to me, but her voice is magnificent. What a triumph for the management!"

Ellen, who adored music, was in a dream.

"I do not think we could ever have seen her before. Her French is so perfect that, if she is English, she must have lived for years over here."

But Mrs FitzHerbert was quite certain she had seen Madame Villeneuve before, though she could not recall where. And in all her excitement and delight, in the final moment of her triumph, in the last act of the opera, when she still held, as if in a spell, the magnificent audience, composed of the most musical personages of Paris and Brussels, Laura's eyes seemed to wander to the little box on the pit tier, to the painted, haggard old woman, with her yellow wig and her ill-arranged chignon, to the shrouded, crouching figure behind her.

As she was finally leaving the stage, amid a furore of plaudits, some instinct which she could not have explained led her to throw a last glance at the box whose occupants had so little interest for anyone else. She saw at once that something had happened, though she had not time, as the curtain fell again, to discover what it was.

There had certainly been a slight scream, a hurried confusion, a rush of attendants. A catastrophe of some kind must certainly have occurred. Perhaps the old lady was taken ill. But why should she be interested in her? Where was the attraction? At this most enthralling crisis of her life, it was extraordinary she should be so attracted by a party of strangers, more especially by the old lady of the party. She inquired of the

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theatre servants, as she prepared to leave the scene of her first triumph, surrounded by a throng of men full of congratulations and flattery. But nobody knew of any catastrophe, and nobody, at such a moment, cared to know.

CHAPTER XII

MRS FITZHERBERT was carried out into a fiacre and hastily conveyed home, totally unconscious of everything around her. The English doctor arrived in a few minutes, and at once announced to Ellen and the maid that Mrs FitzHerbert was suffering from a stroke of apoplexy, and prescribed the ordinary remedies. He also most kindly took Ellen's telegram, and promised to despatch it at the very earliest moment to England. Ellen calculated that this telegram would bring Philip to them by the following evening.

Throughout the night, she and the maid divided the watching and the nursing, but there was no sign of returning consciousness, only heavy breathing, and sometimes a very long-drawn-out sigh.

"I suppose," said the doctor, in the morning, looking at the woman now bereft of all artificial decoration, and lying at last, as she really was, at death's door, "I suppose your mother really is a very old person?"

"We none of us know her age, but my brother and I imagine she must be over seventy."

- "He will be here to-night, I think you said?"
 - "Yes, to-night."
- "Well, I am glad of it. This coma may last for some hours, and then, perhaps, delirium may ensue, but it is difficult to hope for complete recovery at her age. Anyhow, you ought to have your brother with you. I will call again in the middle of the day."

Towards the end of that day, a change suddenly came as Ellen, sitting by the bedside, was counting the half hours until Philip could arrive. Her mother began to talk rapidly — so rapidly that they could scarcely distinguish what she said, and yet she talked eagerly, and as if with acute

interest to some unknown persons whose spirits were around her. It was evident the delirium predicted by the doctor was setting in. A nurse was hurriedly sent for, and Ellen still held her hand, bending over to catch the hurried words.

"It is too late, and I promised to go. It was such a pleasant party, and they told me I should be invited, and the card has never come. So unkind to leave me out. But I shall go next year. Make haste and dress me, Celeste. Not those jewels tonight, and my hair is so badly done now-adays. There is only one hairdresser in London. Oh! how old I am looking tonight!"

She had actually sat up in bed, and was staring wildly round her—an awful spectacle of the wreckage of life—when a low tap at the door was heard, and immediately Philip, white in face, but composed in manner, advanced into the room. His mother did not recognise him. She sank from exhaustion into the bed, and the nurse rearranged her pillows.

"I knew," she muttered, "I should be too late, and all my jewels are gone, my lovely jewels are gone, and I shall never see them again."

Ellen's face was expressive of horror, and the tears would keep stealing down her cheeks, in spite of all her efforts, as she grasped her brother's hand. Presently the weary chatter went on again, and Philip tried not to listen to it.

"That was a beautiful voice, and she will be a great singer. She will sing at all the palaces, and she is a beautiful woman. Ah! I was beautiful once," and the voice ceased for a moment. Philip exchanged glances with the nurse. Would it not be better for Ellen, he thought, to rest in her room for an hour? The end would not come yet.

She went out in an agony of grief, not, it is honest to say, at losing such a mother as hers had been to her, and not certainly from any possible self-condemnation of herself throughout these long years of self-sacrifice and surrender. But the delirium

was so pitiful, so suggestive of the real feelings and thoughts of a miserably frivolous, silly and motiveless life, that it seemed to Ellen to place the whole truth of what she had so long endured in the most bitter and, at the same time, the most sorrowful form it was possible for her to imagine.

At "the hour of death" this aged woman still dwelt on her social failures, on her worldly disappointments, on her puny, wasted ambitions. And this was her mother, the woman who had given her life. Philip joined her in her room.

"You will tell me how it all happened later on. She is dying, poor soul. The nurse says she is growing weaker. We ought to be there together, but you must nerve yourself, Nell. Remember we are together now until we two must die."

It was a dreadful sight. The patches of rouge lay in the furrows of the wrinkled face, the golden wig had been removed, and a lace handkerchief was tied over the bald forehead by the nurse; the sham pearl earrings still fell lustreless from the dying

woman's ears, the artificial teeth were on the toilet table. No figure in the famous "Dance of Death" was ever more ghastly or more convincing of the vanity of the would-be "fashion of this world which passeth away." It was worse than the death in "Clarissa." The two children, as they had once been, waited by the deathbed, for death was drawing so very, very

Philip had often prayed by the side of the dying; he had of course often, at such a time, administered the last sacrament, and breathed words of peace and hope and comfort to the patient soul about to embark, with the Divine Pilot at the helm. But nere there was nothing to console. His words, could he have spoken them, would not have been understood. As he thought of all this, he made a sign to his sister, and Ellen and the nurse and he knelt down together. The dying woman's eyes were hidden by the fatal film: but, even so, they seemed to wander towards the kneeling trio.

"I tell you that they never understood me. I say they never understood."

That is the cry of those who have failed in life, in a thousand different modes and phases, but who still have failed. The wife, who has neglected all her highest duties and lived for self on the week-day and for respectability on the Sunday, when she comes to look back, and finds her husband estranged, her children without affection, and her friends and relations coldly critical, is quite sure that she has been misunderstood.

The husband, whose secret sins have found him out, whose fortune has been dissipated, the world cannot imagine how, whose club friends now greet him with a passing nod, and whose comment to their mutual acquaintance is, "Ruined, poor chap," is still convinced that if his wife and children had only understood him, everything would have gone well. It is a well-worn fallacy, and we may rest assured that the ordinary adult of both sexes has long ago been perfectly understood and

estimated at his or her proper value. The fiction in humanity of living mysteries has been long since exploded.

The moon was at its full that winter night, and the house was silent, as it ever is when death has claimed its victim. Philip did not feel inclined to go to bed. He was restless, agitated, filled with melancholy memories. He had opened the window, for it was a mild night for the time of year, and the moon shone in brilliantly, throwing its melancholy shadows on the French furniture and pictures of dancing girls and impossible scenery. Below there was a garden, hemmed in indeed with brick walls, but containing a little orchard. To some of the apple trees the yellow leaves still clung, for there had so far been a very still and windless winter.

The tramcars, at last, had ceased to run; the streets had gradually grown perfectly silent. The electric lamps lit up weirdly the huge façade and dome of the great Brussels Palace of Law. He sat in a chair by the window and watched it all,

wondering about the heaven in which he always humbly believed, and praying that his mother might yet enter on a nobler life. And then, as he gazed up at one very brilliant star, which he failed at the moment to define, he descended again in his imagination, and wondered what his own career here below was likely to be.

He was considered a rising man in his profession; he was already popular with many of the most well-known and interesting personages in London; his life was replete with many-sided enjoyments, mostly artistic, intellectual, or social. And in all the great charitable societies and enterprises he was already well known—a man of virile ability, great courage and practical energy, writing books, preaching sermons, studying the last great novel and the latest interesting play.

The stars seemed suddenly to him to be very melancholy. The moon was hidden by a dark bank of clouds. Oh! world full of success and prosperity for him, what would he not have given to have

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lived his life over again! But the apple trees, shuddering in the chilly air of morning in the Brussels garden, reminded him of the futility of all such aspirations.

CHAPTER XIII

As soon as possible after the funeral at Ixelles, Philip and his sister returned to London, resolving to set up a home in the rectory there together. Mrs FitzHerbert's debts were large, and economy was necessary for her children for some time to come. For the present, Philip's rectory must remain only partially furnished, but, little by little, Ellen determined out of her own income to make it a refined, comfortable and tasteful home.

The parishioners came to call on her, and were delighted with her simplicity and sympathetic manner. Some thought her really pretty, but all agreed she was charming. It seemed as if the darkness which had so long overshadowed her life had vanished at last, and though not very

well suited to the part, she tried to take the proper interest in all that concerned what is known in clerical circles as "the parish." But the congregation which the Rev. Philip FitzHerbert was gradually collecting round him at St Mary's was in no sense parochial.

Philip had a bold way in his pulpit of facing all the great difficulties of modern life, all the newer developments of worldly sin and doubt, which delighted the diffident and drew to his church all the finer intellects, weary of the commonplace, and dangerously irritated by the platitudes.

There were, of course, the ordinary decorous, drowsy persons, excellent, be it admitted, as listeners to the law, and generous ever as regarded the offertory bag. These persons, after the stupendous conflict of mind naturally entailed by the consideration of changing their church and still more of offending their clergyman, arrived at the conclusion that the vicar of St Mary's was broad and loose in his views, that he discussed subjects unsuited

to the Sunday morning reposeful attitude, that even sometimes he was indelicate, and often unduly vehement in his denunciation of the ordinary proceedings of perfectly respectable if slightly frivolous members of society.

These persons silently gave up their pews, withdrew to a neighbouring more orthodox church, and expressed their opinion, if pressed on the subject, that Mr FitzHerbert "went too far." Their vacated seats were instantly snapped up by a totally different class of hearers, and mostly of the masculine sex—men in some cases who had not been to church for years, and who listened at first with cynical curiosity to what this new apostle could possibly have to say, which arrested their confrères in the intellectual world of London.

The answer soon came to their quick and subtle minds. To begin with, it was the preacher's courage. All those difficulties, so constantly evaded, which habitually present themselves to the young and the nobleminded—that host which still echoes the

dirge of the Roman, "Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor" — found in Philip their friend and their saviour.

No problem so delicate in its suggestions nor so difficult of solution, in a world desirous if possible to pass on the other side, ever found him afraid. He defiantly arrayed everything which told against the consistency and truth of his own convictions, and then he bowled his cannon balls against the nine-pins which stood before him, and as they fell one by one, he derisively appealed to the intellect of his audience.

His contempt for all that was mean, all that was sordid, all that was untrue, unjust, ungenerous in life, which sometimes reminded the scholars who listened to him of what Juvenal might have been if only he had been also a Christian, seemed like a clarion's note, summoning all the followers of Mammon to deadly combat.

Nor did Philip omit to make his services attractive in the more conventional manner. The greatest organist in London was retained at, of course, very considerable expense; his

choir of boys and young men, sought "high and low" in every quarter of the town, reached an eminence which, in itself alone, attracted those who were fond of sacred music to his constant services. Many of these young men afterwards became famous singers, and traced with gratitude their first steps towards successful independence to the organist of St Mary's.

Mr Stone, who had given up his chapel and, with ample means, was devoting his time to literature and other congenial pursuits, though still in reality a Unitarian, now always attended St Mary's on Sunday mornings, and sometimes, in his humility, took a curate's place and read the lessons of the day.

"I always feel the better, Philip, for your sermon and your music." Sometimes he lunched afterwards at the rectory, and aired his own odd theories for Ellen's benefit.

But Stone was a generous man, and helped largely to put up the magnificent window, designed by the greatest of living artists, and which still remains the finest modern church window in London. When Stone found two hundred pounds was still required to pay for the window, he sent a cheque from Harley Street, and told his daughter that he considered her education was now absolutely finished, so far as masters were concerned, but that she ought to come with him to St Mary's on Sunday mornings, and especially study the great west window.

Stone was full of ideals, and the stern, ascetic, courageous preacher of modern thought became to him for the moment his greatest hero.

"When tired of the service of worship and prayer, when weary of the preacher's insistence on the duties and philosophies of this life and the hope of greater possibilities in that which is to come, take comfort and absorb yourself in the contemplation of this window."

This is what Philip said from his pulpit the Sunday after the window had been put in its place. Stone, recognising the beauty of Philip's realism, thoroughly agreed with him. He agreed too with the view taken in the newspapers generally when a minor canonry was offered to Philip by the dean.

"We rejoice," said the chorus, "in this recognition of great talent and earnest influence; and small as it is, we hail it as an instalment of the greater honours which must await, sooner or later, this well-known clergyman."

It was the more generous of Stone, for he might have been jealous—he might, as lesser men would undoubtedly have done, have contrasted his own professional failure in life with the flowing tide of popularity of his younger friend. He, too, had once been ambitious. Had he not been chaplain to a royal personage? Had he not written several volumes of poetry, and lived in intimacy with certainly one of the greatest poets of his day? But Stone was far beyond all such puerilities.

The only doubt at this time which beset him was, ought he to see much more of Ellen FitzHerbert, both in her interests and his own? Of course, he could never love as he once had loved. Love, as we know his dictum ran, was a condition only possible with regard to one woman throughout human existence. Still, admiration, respect, intelligent sympathy are good things in their way, especially where a lady of delightful manners and pleasing appearance is concerned.

"But I am too old," he cogitated. "I had better still remain that 'rolling Stone,' which gathers a good deal in spite of the proverb."

It will be observed that he was a man with some confidence in himself and his own powers of acquisition, and in Ellen's presence he was not exactly humble, only didactic and instructive. There is, of course, the immortal instance of Abélard to prove the exception; but, as a rule, it may be safely predicted that Heloise will not fall in love with her tutor.

Moreover, Ellen at this time was intensely interested in attending sales of all kinds where old furniture, prints and china and curiosities could be possibly secured to furnish

the rectory rooms. Her aspiration was to make Philip's home a really desirable one, and then to see some charming young woman come and share it with him.

She forgot that the years had been passing by all this time, and that her brother could no longer be included in the pathetic nomenclature of earlier days—"the boys." Alas! how ridiculous the phrase sounds in the presence of stout middle age! And Philip, if he, as the old ladies who had deserted him declared, "went too far," was undoubtedly "getting on."

His figure was no longer slight, though the vigour of his mind was certainly greater than it had been at any other period of his life.

Ellen retained her youth much more gaily than her brother, though her mind, as she well knew, was of far inferior force to his. She belonged to the class of meek, lovable, mostly little, women who go through life smiling through their tears, effacing themselves wherever it is possible to do so, and bearing the burthens of others on

shoulders which do not appear to have been specially framed with that object.

Is it possible that these women, whose lives seems to be passed so far away, in thought and taste at all events, from the noisy world around them, whose unostentatious career no critic or admirer has ever placed on record, can have anything to do with those who, the Apostle tells us, "have passed out of great tribulation"?

Stone, of all men, was writing the history of the Elizabethan poets, and whenever he came to see Philip, he told Ellen how he was getting on with his work.

"Naturally," he said one day, "you know nothing of the beautiful madrigals and love poems of the period, which have so recently been edited once more. But with Sidney, you are, at all events, familiar."

"We are not a poetical family—Philip and I," she said demurely.

"Tell that great man," he answered, with habitual egoism, "I have nearly finished Sidney."

He hurried away, and did not call again

for many weeks. And, when he came to say good-bye, he was going to Venice with his daughter, where he hoped some day to live and to die, and to write his last poem, when the time arrived. At least, so he said.

CHAPTER XIV

WHITSUNTIDE had come, and weary Londoners dispersed in every direction to breathe the early summer air among the azaleas and rhododendrons, or to dream of long voyages at the vulgar seaside resorts of Merry England.

Lord Dovedale went to join the amusing party he was sure to find at Stratham, where Lady Ann had arrived a few days previously, to spend, as the newspapers to her great vexation always announced, "the Whitsuntide."

It was a most beautiful, still, summer evening in the early days of June as Lord Dovedale was driven through the rather flat and uninteresting part of Bedfordshire in which the historical manor of Stratham is situated.

As an agriculturist—one of his many sides of life—his lordship gazed with curiosity on the well-remembered large-acred fields. He knew the United States thoroughly well from an agricultural point of view, and, though at an uninteresting time of the year, he was meditating on the corn prospects of this great country in the future.

Presently, as the horses slackened their speed and mounted a slight hill, he saw, far away, in the misty light of pronounced summer weather, the beautiful red chimneys of Stratham House. The flag was flying, which betokened one of Lady Ann's unfrequent presences, and the park, which they were now entering by the Cambridgeshire Lodge gate, was still bathed in the sunshine of a long warm day. The groups of deer were resting beneath the shade of the magnificent oaks, and Lord Dovedale sighed as his eyes wandered over the familiar scene.

This house had once belonged to a famous statesman, as all the world knows, and his daughter, at her great age, still kept everything in the most perfect order and

good taste, still maintained the state and appanage of her rank, but filled her house, as we have seen, with the world of Bohemia.

The carriage had already passed through the long oak avenue, and was now hurrying by the great yew hedges, which, intersecting each other, hide away the beautiful gardens and the view of the fine lake, which lies immediately in front of one side of the house. The turrets and the twisted chimneys, reminiscent of Hatfield, recalled at once to him the best specimens of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean country houses of England.

It was the sacred hour of tea, and those of her guests who were within range had gathered round Lady Ann, in a shady recess on the terrace near the chapel, where the meal was spread. She welcomed Lord Dovedale affectionately, and he greeted those of the party he knew, including Miss Parmenter and the second poet of the age.

"Pandori comes to-morrow, and brings with him Mdlle. Villeneuve, the daughter of the new prima donna. I asked the great

lady herself, but she cannot get away from Covent Garden, and, besides, says plainly that she will not go into society, though she gives no reason for her churlishness. Still, she allows her young daughter to come to me, and I have promised to take care of her myself. Oh, Dovedale! what a voice that mother has! I prefer her infinitely to Grisi—in short, to any singer of my long life. I wonder if the girl has any art?"

Lord Dovedale smiled in sphinx-like fashion.

"Of course, Lady Ann, as usual, in the superlative degree. But to me, since she appeared, the marvellous fact is the suddenness of it all. She is no longer in her first youth, nobody seems to know where she has studied, or why we have not heard of her before. She drops from the clouds at her present age, with a voice which has taken Brussels and now London by storm. I heard her in *Dinorah* the other night. She certainly was magnificent, and I am told she has a superb offer from New York for this coming winter."

"Who was her husband?" asked Mr Grimston, the Clerk of the Privy Council, with the most absolute gravity.

"That really is of no importance," said Lady Ann. "In the artistic world they certainly marry and are given in marriage, only; you know, it doesn't count. You cannot trammel genius with details of that sort. They have laws of their own."

"I am very sorry to have infringed them by such a very simple question."

"I am afraid," retorted Lord Dovedale, laughing, "no one will believe in you, Grimston, in the pose of simpleton."

Lady Ann always rested before dinner, and she now retired into the house. The second poet went down alone to the lake, beside whose pellucid waters the inspiration had before now come, which had appealed to that select audience who considered him the Poet-Laureate of the future. The swans, who angrily followed his footsteps at the border of the lake, where their cygnets were commencing their early career, disturbed his equanimity. He became angry himself, and

those malicious lines of Byron anent the swan kept ringing in his ears. He saw Lord Dovedale approaching—a man with whom he had no sympathy—and he fairly fled towards the beautiful rose gardens.

Lady Ann sat behind the masses of orchids which covered her artistic dinner table, and, rested by her siesta, was, as usual, the brightest and the most sparkling of the company.

"I went to hear your clergyman at St Mary's, Dovedale, as you wished. I was a little startled. Miss Burney was never more explicit, and he charged with all the fervour of an old Crusader. But his crusade seemed to me too much in detail. I am old-fashioned, and like the world and the flesh and, of course, the devil, to be reckoned up in gross, not in net."

Miss Parmenter, eating her salmon cutlets à la Norvégienne, noted Lady Ann's view with approval, and whispered to her neighbour, Mr Grimston, "But what about 'the little sins,' on which an entire volume, long forgotten, was once written?"

"I confess," said the official, "that the contemplation of the great ones has often entirely spoilt my appetite."

Miss Parmenter had long been searching for an effective title to her new novel, but this cynical speech brought at once to her mind the right name. "I shall call it," she thought to herself, "The Sinful Official."

"He suddenly made a violent attack on the Sabbath-breakers of London, of his own congregation, in short," went on Lady Ann.

"Well, that could not affect you," answered Dovedale. "To begin with, you do not belong to his congregation, and, attending morning service, you could only smile with conscious virtue."

"He then went on to allude, with withering scorn, to the people who on that beautiful summer morning had gone down for the day to Maidenhead and elsewhere to spend their time on the river, neglecting totally all the proper observances of the day."

"Well, Lady Ann, that was quite irrelevant, as far as you are concerned. No one can imagine you joining in the Sunday throng on the river Thames."

"No, I suppose not. Anyhow, I felt still more virtuous, quite appreciated again the distich of Hudibras:—

"'Compound for sins they are inclined to By damning those they have no mind to.'

"But, towards the end of his sermon, he grew, as I thought, unpleasantly personal. 'The old ladies of society, in this great city,' he said, 'at this time of year, so far from influencing or showing an example to the young, are more worldly, more pleasure-seeking, more frivolous than even their grand-children, whom they have seen trained up to the same empty, aimless and godless career.' I shall not go and hear Mr FitzHerbert again until I have converted him. By-the-bye, give me that opportunity, Dovedale. Bring him to see me. Like Mr Grimston, in his conventional query before dinner, I must ask, Has he a wife?"

[&]quot;Never married," replied his lordship.

[&]quot;He looks to me," said Lady Ann, some-

what maliciously, "as if he had had his romance, notwithstanding."

The second poet overheard.

"All clever men have their romances," he ventured to say.

"Yes, but Mr FitzHerbert should remember that he is obliged to be in church, and I am not, on Sunday morning. He also forgot that there are old ladies in London who, even if they do not move in what is called superficially society, object to personal allusions, and are even old-fashioned enough to resent them."

"You must have sat behind one of the pillars, Lady Ann. He could not have seen you."

"Mr Grimston, shall I ask you where you were that Sunday morning? That would be in the FitzHerbert vein, don't you think?"

But Lord Dovedale took up the cudgels for his nominee.

"There never was such a success," he said warmly. "He is the most eloquent preacher in London; he attracts the people who never went to church before, and his congregation is quite the most remarkable one I have ever seen anywhere. He is absolutely Christian, in the very best sense of the term; he is broad-minded, indeed, but he can be severe enough when it is necessary; and, as for his energy, the bishop told me only the other day there was no clergyman in his diocese who worked so hard. No, my dear Lady Ann, do not let us belittle or malign Fitz-Herbert. I only wish I could ever hope to be half so good as he is."

Lady Ann loved to make the Derby winner "sit up," as a vulgar generation terms it. She was delighted with his spirit, and his loyal defence of his favourite clergyman. No one knew better than Lady Ann all the great good in Dovedale's nature, and his sudden generous outburst by no one could be more appreciated than by her. Her fine eyes were full of emotion.

"My dear boy, I am so glad you stand by your friends, as you always did, and do not fall in with my personal pique. Heap coals of fire on my head, and, as I said before, make him call in Mayfair."

Dovedale, a little sulkily, subsided. He did not care to be drawn out in his opinions, especially before Lady Ann's guests, whom he always half suspected of taking notes for future use. He relapsed into silence, mentally vowing that he would be d——d before he took FitzHerbert to call on Lady Ann.

"We shall be all changed to-morrow," said she, as she watched the pool players. "We shall not care for even officials, or poets, or statesmen, or for Bridge, or Pool. dori is coming with the beautiful Villeneuve. Poor Pandori! He has been for a week at Bath, endeavouring to organise the great West of England concert, and growing grey amid the jealousy and rivalry of the performers. He detests Bath, he loathes Milsom Street, he expires in the Circus, and he has had several fits in the Royal I wrote and consoled him—the Crescent. usual conventional consolation. Bath is a famous, historical city, it has become a modern town of fashion, and no novel describing the last century manners is at all likely to be read without much reference to it.

But the memories of Beau Nash have failed to appeal to Pandori, so I told him the bon mot, made to myself by a great man of this century: 'If God made the country, and man made the town, most certainly the devil made the country-town.' Pandori seems cheered by that reflection, and is to meet the 'Belle Rose' at St Pancras tomorrow, and bring her down here into my care."

Miss Parmenter that night added a long chapter to her new novel in the solitude of her bedroom, gazing out on the lake and the ancient oaks and the starlit sky. The official sinner met a danseuse in a country house. As she often said, it was the country in which she felt most inspired.

CHAPTER XV

LAURA had at last attained to wealth and fame, and she remained, as was to be expected, utterly unspoiled by it. Since she arrived at Covent Garden, the fashionable world of music had overwhelmed her with flattery, with invitations, with that insidious adoration which is nearly always successful in the capture of its object. But Madame Villeneuve told not only the eccentric Lady Ann, but also all the great entertainers London Society, that her health and strength did not permit her to indulge in any excitement or relaxation beyond her art. She was perfectly willing, occasionally, at the greatest houses, and for the greatest price, to charm an audience collected by the latest American millionaire, or the widow of the most famous Uitlander from South Africa; but it was a purely commercial transaction. She had no ambition to live amongst the fashionable or the wealthy. When her day was over, she was glad to rest, and when a respite came, to get out of town into pure air, and to drive over the Downs near the South Coast.

But she fully recognised that this would be a poor and dull life for Rose, who was now seventeen, and for whom she wished all the gaiety and happiness suitable to her years. She was able now, at last, to give her all that was necessary for her to appear bien mise in the world, and when Lady Ann kindly proposed to take special care of her, and to look after her herself at Stratham, she accepted the offer, and told Rose that her own maid would go with her, and that she was to stay for four days.

Rose felt a little nervous at facing a country house party alone for the first time, and endeavoured to escape the ordeal. But her mother was firm.

"There must be a beginning to those things for a young girl, and Lady Ann is most kind, and will take the mother's place for me."

"But why can't you come with me, mother?" complained Rose.

"You forget, Rose, the theatre. But besides that, I never shall go to parties, either in London or the country. I want such rest as I can get." She spoke decisively. "Don't, Rosie, say I am selfish, and mind you are careful. Don't tell secrets about me, if indeed there are any. And if they ask about your father, say (which is true) that you never knew him, as he died so early."

She was growing into a lovely girl, full of animation and intelligence, with a facility of conversation quite unusual in one so quietly brought up as she had been. Her figure already gave great promise of much charm, and her hair was of the most attractive hue—that ruddy gold so rarely seen in England. Her complexion was of extreme pallor, and her smile the mean between roguish fun and demure inquiry.

Pandori, at this crisis, appeared on the

scene, and at once offered to escort Rose and her maid, if Madame Villeneuve would permit him to do so, to Stratham. Pandori was an excellent friend and fellow-traveller, and Madame Villeneuve was not a person to be very exacting about the escort of her daughter, who had been brought up to take the greatest care of herself.

So Pandori and the French maid and Rose travelled down together to Stratham in a second-class carriage, chatting familiarly all the way. Pandori, like most of his class, had no great range of subjects for conversation. He began always with music, and he fluttered round musicians and operas, and Wagner and divas of every nation under the sun, until Rose was fairly exhausted.

Somehow she had not fallen, as would have seemed probable, into the vein of the musical world. She loved to hear her mother sing, she rejoiced in her success, and she greatly enjoyed the tangible results in carriages and horses and luxuries of every kind. But then her view of life was different. Her ex-

perience, so far, to begin with, of men and manners was nil. She had what Georgian days was called "a pretty taste" in literature—in poetry and romance. had none of the coldness and reserve which Laura's long life of struggle had made a second nature. If she had possessed her mother's talents, and realised the same success, her idea would have been to go everywhere, and see everything, to enjoy the incense of adulation, and, in short, to be human on every side, to be bright and even credulous. She sometimes wondered at what she thought almost callousness on her mother's part.

How little the daughters realise the influences of the past! They will do so later on; they will look back and wonder at their own stupidity, they will shed a tear over the irrecoverable past, they will sob in the quiet churchyard, and strip the conservatories of the husband who was found for them by their mother, in order to testify their filial affection.

People announce the anniversaries of their

dead parents and husbands in the newspapers with appropriate texts and mottoes. It is much more religious to look after the living, and not to advertise a posthumous affection.

Rose could not know that, often after an exciting night at the opera house, when her mother came home utterly prostrated with fatigue, and worn out by the enthusiasm of her audience, she seemed to herself to be once more gazing through a very small window, looking towards the north of London, towards Hampstead and Harrow, through a mist of years, with all the sorrow and pain and bitter recollection of her early girlish life. It was the window in Queen Charlotte's Hospital where her child had been born, the window which lighted the bare, bleak room where the luxurious Rose had first opened her eyes on this strange world of ours.

But Rose, in a quarter of an hour, found her way to Lady Ann's heart. The beauty and the simplicity and the gaiety of the girl appealed to her at once. "My dear," said the grande dame of another generation, holding her hand, "I am delighted to have you here, and to make your acquaintance. I am only sorry your mother's engagements did not allow of her accompanying you, but I hope our excellent friend Pandori has taken care of you."

Rose was overwhelmed with all the attention paid to her by her hostess, and subsequently by all the guests, especially the men. To Lord Dovedale, a man of the world in the widest sense, and so habituated to every type of woman and girl in many lands, and under all conceivable influences, the bright naïveté of Rose was extraordinarily attractive.

And, on the other hand, to her, fresh from her school at Brussels, and accustomed to a lonely and rather silent home of the migratory order, the brilliant conversation around her, the historical portraits, the magnificent works of art, above all, the charming hostess, with her old-world dress and manner, and her delightfully unconTHE MINOR CANON

ventional view of life and humanity, presented a most novel and a most enthralling picture. Not that little Rose lost her head or showed emotion. But the next morning when, in compliance with Lady Ann's request, she gave her arm to the old lady, and strolled alone with her into the rose garden, she felt almost bewildered as Lady Ann said in her gentle voice, "And you are happy here, Rose? I am afraid it is rather dull for a young girl-no eligible young men to flirt with, no dancing in the evening, no young ladies to chatter to you in your bedroom before you go to bed. It was quite cruel of me to have asked you here."

And then, as the girl protested it was all too beautiful and enjoyable, that she was too good and kind, and that she had never been so happy in her life before, Lady Ann bent down and kissed her.

"You must come often to me in London where I live," she said. "You know, I daresay, that I come here very seldom. I

like London better than any other place in the world. I am like old 'Q.'"

Lord Dovedale rowed her about in a boat on the lake, endangered his life by endeavouring to gather the water lilies for her, and told her stories, as they slowly floated on, about his visits to Baghdad, to Pekin, to Denver and Dawson City. In the evening, Pandori, who was delighted with the social success of his young protégée, was more than usually amiable at the piano. He sang some of his own compositions, and eventually a Neapolitan boat song, which was new to the entire company, and received the special and enthusiastic praises of the second poet.

Grimston, who made love, as a professional, to every good-looking girl or woman who would allow him to do so, murmured in Rose's ear, "What a song for a honeymoon! How I should like to be the first person to show you the Bay of Naples! If only the proprieties permitted, we might start tomorrow, and by Saturday have forgotten the world in the shadow of Vesuvius."

"What nonsense you are talking, Grimston," said Lady Ann, whose sharp ears detected his bathos. "The shadow of Vesuvius indeed! When you marry I suppose you will take your wife to Pompeii, and explain the museum, or climb up Vesuvius to look at the lava. But then, of course, you must marry a Girton girl."

Rose was laughing, but the Clerk of the Council remained undaunted.

"Lady Ann," he said, "when that time comes, if it ever does come for me, I shall ask you to accompany us. Even a honeymoon would be dull without you."

But the music still floated through the long vista of rooms. Pandori, as a compliment to Miss Parmenter, who had made the request, was singing, with exquisite pathos, "Kathleen Mavourneen." It was a great condescension on his part, and the company appreciated it. There are some melodies, they conceded, which were like Cleopatra's beauties, and in that house, somehow, everything was melodious, artistic, intellectual.

There were not to be found at Stratham any of those deplorable mechanical toys invented to imitate, harshly and discordantly, a divine and an immortal art, to increase at compound interest the incomes of European aurists, and to shatter every nerve in the present, and every hope for the future, of those unwilling victims whose cruel destiny it is to be compelled to listen to them.

But Lady Ann grew restless in the country, and had already remained a day or two longer than she had intended, in order to keep Rose with her. So the signal of departure to London was now given, and the Blue Peter was hoisted. The gay circle was to disband and return to the parks and the streets of a London summer.

"She is the most delightful girl I have met for many years, extremely pretty, perfectly sincere, fresh in all her ideas, and so simple. I wonder, Dovedale, who her father was. Cannot you find out? I think he must have been one of 'us.' I should like to know. But I shall make her happy in London, and keep her with me as

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much as I can. And, no doubt, the diva will be grateful." Lord Dovedale smiled.

"What would Lady Dent say to this new fancy on her mother's part?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE Minor Canon had gradually found himself compelled to give up his systematic refusals to dine with his parishioners, and so, at this season of the year in London, he constantly took Ellen out to visit the houses of his hospitable friends, many of them the most interesting and most agreeable and most distinguished denizens of the vast West End of London.

Nothing could ever have made Philip worldly, or pushing, or socially ambitious, but he enjoyed the brilliancy and the variety, at their most telling hour, of the men and women who lived to influence others by their writings, or their art, or their great territorial positions.

After all, this was in accordance with one side of the teaching of the Church, of which

he was, in the now almost discarded phrase, a minister. Ellen delighted too in those attractive parties, which were, however, only possible to Philip on certain evenings, when duties at St Mary's did not claim his presence. The question arises, as often in the case of other successful persons, was he really now a happy man?

Ellen watched her brother eagerly and narrowly, and wondered if he was. Considering that he was on the verge of forty years and inclined to obesity, he was still a wonderfully young-looking and handsome man. His manner had all the sympathetic attraction, and his mind all the vivacious freshness which had always been so charming to others. As to activity, he was literally never still, travelling constantly hither and thither from one part of London to another by the underground railway or the omnibus.

During his transits he was always reading books and newspapers and even magazines of every description. His sermons at the cathedral or St Mary's were often published in the newspapers, his novel—a semi-religious one of no ordinary power—had been received with eulogy by the critics. On the platform his fine, vigorous eloquence was always effective, and, in Convocation, to which he had been lately elected, he was listened to with respect.

To come to his home life, we already know, in a measure, what it now was. An only sister, who idolised him, forestalled every wish and every comfort, lived only to make him happy and contented, and managed both his household and his social arrangements with tact and economy. To crown the edifice of human prosperity, he had a strong physical constitution, never suffered from ill-health, and at forty was surrounded with Shake-speare's ideal picture of old age, namely, "troops of friends."

It has been said that Philip never betrayed himself, his inner man and nature. Had he been asked the question just now propounded, the bright, clever smile would have signified, "Call no man happy until he dies," and the Pagan proverb contains this amount of truth, beside the obvious suggestion of the uncertainty of life, that no man in this world can ever (whatever may be vouchsafed to him in the next) altogether forget the past, obliterate the fatal page, or wipe out, as with a sponge, the writing placed there in indelible characters.

Lord Dovedale, his patron, and now his friend, was giving a dinner—a political and literary dinner—at the big town house at the corner of the Square, and Philip and Ellen were bidden to it. As they entered the brilliantly-lighted library, where the party was assembling, and where Lady Dovedale stood greeting her friends, Philip saw with interest that the room was already filled with several famous politicians.

Sometimes Philip yearned for the excitement of political life, and thought, if he had not become a clergyman, he would have liked to try his fortune in the House of Commons.

Presently arrived Lady Ann Vain, in splendid diamonds, but entirely in black, and with a collar of sapphires round her throat. She knew everyone in the room

except the Minor Canon and his sister, and she recognised him, for Lord Dovedale had promised to ask him.

"The Church as well as the State," she explained to the man on her other side, who happened to be a great historian of European fame.

"So I see, but who is the handsome, middle-aged clergyman?"

"That gentleman," said Lady Ann, "is the Minor Canon of St Mary's, one of the most popular preachers of the day, but, of course, as a Catholic, you know nothing about him."

"I have heard much of his success and eloquence. I shall hope to make his acquaintance. And the pretty woman with him is madame, I suppose?"

"Not at all; I believe he is unmarried, and that lady must be his sister."

The conversation drifted into broader lines. Lord Dovedale talked to his godmother about the debate that afternoon in the House of Lords.

"The war," he said, "is talked of as

being over. I am afraid this is far from being the case, and I confess I thought the debate to-day exceedingly meagre and uninteresting."

"Do you know, of late years I have restricted myself to reading the speeches, in both houses, of only a very limited number of members. I have not the time to read through all the debates, and I certainly have not the inclination. The bores, of course, are innumerable, countless as the sands on the sea-shore, and then men who are certain to be eloquent, judicious, patriotic and earnest can be numbered on two hands, if not on one."

"How many interesting debates you must recollect. You must have heard many of the most famous speeches, including Disraeli's celebrated philippic against Sir Robert Peel, and you knew well the great Duke of Wellington."

"If you would only write your reminiscences," said the historian, with the melancholy Milesian visage. "If you would only write your life, how enthralling it would be!"

"I am too old," laughed Lady Ann, "and I have lived too long out of the gay world to be able to write for the moderns. Besides, I should be sure to forget so much that was in its day most interesting. I remember Rogers calling at our house one day and telling me a vast amount of gossip, and at last obsequiously retiring. I thought he had departed, but he came back and put his head into the door.

"'Oh, I forgot to tell you,' he said anxiously—and then he repeated some item he had omitted of his not very good-natured London scandal, with all the air of a Court newsman. "I should be like Mr Rogers, and forget all my best tattle until my life was published.

"Dr Burney, the musical doctor, the father of Madame d'Arblay, once wrote in a letter: 'To fit himself for the company of Apollo and the Muses, man should try to divest himself of such infirmities of nature as celestial beings never feel.' Now, I could never be celestial."

Lady Dovedale never gave music after her

dinner parties, and disliked all Bohemians, so the party broke up into the usual groups in the long suite of rooms, and everyone talked; some in whispers, some brilliantly, and some in the ordinary London lingo.

Lady Ann was introduced to Philip at her special request, and he sat down beside her.

"I listened to your distribe on the old ladies," she said, rather drily. "I was one of your congregation, but not one of those whose frivolous career you held up to condemnation. Nevertheless, I was very much aggrieved at the sweeping way you attacked them."

Philip considered.

"But do not you agree with me, you who have so long lived among the intellectual and the earnest?"

"I know very little of modern society. I am not fitted to be its censor, and I have lived so long that I sometimes feel like a ghost of the past. Still, a congregation, or church, contains so many varieties of miserable sinners that it is discreet not to be too sweeping."

The charm of her manner, her gentle voice, full of wisdom and experience, did not fail to attract Philip, as it had attracted men and women of all classes of life for certainly two generations. He admitted her playful accusation.

"We try to do our duty as well as we can, and my experience certainly is that nearly everybody has one good side." He could have said nothing which would have pleased her more.

"Come and see me," she said, with genuine goodwill. "Come and lunch on Sunday."

"I am afraid my rule is inflexible. I never go from home on Sundays in London."

"Well, I forgot, of course, that you practically do on Sundays as the New York stockbrokers do sometimes, and hang out a card on which is written, 'This is my busy day.' But, at all events, come and see me." She did not ask him to bring up Ellen to her. Some instinct told Lady Ann that she should not care for Ellen, whose appearance, and dress and manner, did not attract her. She

had liked men of intelligence all her life, and had gathered them always round her, but she had often found their womenkind strangely uncongenial, insipid and uninteresting.

Lady Ann had always formed her impressions with great celerity, and, as years went on, had felt increasing confidence in them. Ellen's nobility of nature and self-sacrificing love of duty would never have appealed to Lady Ann.

The little French attaché, who had been talking to Ellen, adopted the same view, and he approached Lady Ann with a smile; and as Philip moved away, took the empty chair.

"I thought," he said in excellent English, "that my lady never dined out."

"Never, almost, but Lord Dovedale is my godson. In England, as you know, we always dine with our godchildren, and we always leave them a legacy in our wills."

He did not quite know if Lady Ann was in earnest. She had the reputation of being occasionally satirical. "I congratulate you," he said, "on the cuisine of your godson."

"Vous avez raison," said Lady Ann, as she stood in that beautiful modern hall. "He came, five years ago, from the Palace at Monaco. My godson's chef has only one drawback, at least from Lord Dovedale's point of view. He is a bad sailor, and he has always to find a chargé d'affaires when his lordship goes for a cruise."

Philip and Ellen walked home. It was a fine night, and only part of a long straight street had to be traversed before they reached their home.

"What a delightful party, Philip! I did not attempt to talk, but I listened, and was so interested and amused. I shall always remember this evening." And Philip was in high spirits also.

"Lady Ann Vain, you know, is one of the most remarkable old ladies in London, and she so seldom goes into that kind of society, I believe, that it is quite an event to meet her."

The riot of the streets was dying away, the old print shops were long since shut, the legends of iniquity were far distant. Philip was quite gay as he let himself in with his latch-key.

CHAPTER XVII

Rose came home to her mother in a state of rapture after her visit at Stratham, and as it was the first country house visit she had ever made, so it remained until the end of her life the best and the most fondly remembered. Of the beauties of the house, of the park, of the china, of the pictures, her eloquence never wearied. But, above all else, the personality of Lady Ann had most deeply impressed her. There never was anyone so handsome in old age, so clever in conversation, such a wit, such a hostess, such a really grande dame.

Her mother listened with some of the listlessness of manner which had become habitual to her, but she cordially agreed as to the kindness of Lady Ann, and hoped she would not, as some harsh critics have sug-

gested is often the case, forget her young protégée in the multitudes of London.

"You will see," said Rose, with all the sanguine enthusiasm of youth, "she will ask me to her house in a few days. Her last words were, as I went away, 'I am not going to lose sight of you, Rose. You must come to Curzon Street very soon."

"Well, dearest," said Madame Villeneuve, with an attempt at effusion, "I shall be thankful for you to have such a friend, especially as my profession absorbs so much of my time both day and night."

Laura had taken a cottage in the north-western part of London. It was a long way from Covent Garden, but, as to so many artistes, fresh air at night was of primary importance to her, and the distance backwards and forwards, even when taken four times a day, was traversed in the comfortable little carriage she was now able to afford. There was a garden which, in the summer—the only time of year she was likely to be there—presented some attraction to her with her early country tastes and her love of roses,

though, as gardeners all know, the rose is distinctly an antagonistic flower to London. She had a little greenhouse, and geraniums, and her life was naturally so occupied that these few flowers seemed a solace in the early mornings when she looked out upon them, or on Sundays when Rose and she, with scissors and basket, fancied themselves almost out of town.

Pandori often came rushing up in a hansom on Sunday afternoons, sometimes even to luncheon. He looked upon Rose with almost a paternal air of interest and admiration. He was by no means the ordinary Italian composer or artist, who makes love and has no scruples. He was intoxicated with madame's success and, in a lesser degree, delighted with the impression which Rose had made on the world at Stratham.

When the invitation came, as it very shortly did, inviting Rose to one of the famous Sunday luncheons, he clapped his little fat hands with absolute glee.

"If my lady has, as I believe to be the case, taken really a fancy to Miss Rose, her

future is made. She will marry her well and happily, as these grandes dames always can."

Laura, who found herself alone with Pandori the very Sunday of this first luncheon, determined, after much anxious thought, to confide in him to a certain extent. He was so simple and so good, and he had done so much for her. Of course he had done well for himself also, but why not?

"My only doubt, Pandori," she said sadly, "is whether I am right in allowing Rose to go to Lady Ann's. I cannot make up my mind to go with her. I have long resigned myself to a lonely life, but am I wise in letting so attractive a girl mix by herself in the society with which I am told Lady Ann surrounds herself? You and I, Pandori, know something of that sort of world. Is it fair to trust a girl, alone, among such people? You know their morals where the daughter of a singer is concerned, and where there is no father or brother to protect, and where even the mother never appears at her side."

Pandori shrugged his shoulders.

"Lady Ann has promised to look after her. She told me so, almost in words. She is not a person to break her promise. You may trust her."

"Perhaps you are right," she acquiesced. "Anything is better for her than being always with me, and I have done my best to put her on her guard."

"She is, in my opinion, well able to take care of herself."

"Then there is another thing which often troubles me," Laura went on with hesitation. "When the lover comes, as no doubt he will, what am I to say to him, supposing he asks questions?"

"The lover," said Pandori, impetuously, "who asks for a pedigree is no lover, and no fit husband for Rose."

He did not know Laura's history, and he did not wish to know it. In his world they were too well-bred to be curious on such matters, or to make any inquiries even if marriage was in question. The shadowy father is a matter of course, and no one more cordially agrees with Shakespeare than

the opera singer, or even the *impressario*, when he says that "the course of true love never did run smooth."

Pandori took his cup of coffee, and his cigarette, discussed the attitude of the Opera House during last week, and chatted somewhat nervously on the prospects of the German opera which was to be produced on the following night. On such subjects he always found Laura deeply interested, sympathetic, even excited. She had forgotten about Rose when he walked down the little garden path, hailed his cab, and drove away, kissing his hand.

When he was gone, and Rose had not yet returned, the languor and fatigue came back, the now famous prima donna succumbed to a melancholy reverie, and momentarily forgot all her triumphs and her most successful and extraordinary musical career. For, strange as it may appear, considering how little many of us are affected by more or less similar reminiscences, Laura had never forgotten her disgrace in early life. And yet her sin had been only the weakness of an hour, the illusion

of a girl of seventeen, the momentary failure of an existence in which self-control had never been taught, the one stumble in the march of life. But her punishment had been undoubtedly very long, very bitter, very far reaching. Oh! so long, that it sometimes seemed to her like an eternity. She often remembered the line from the hymn which sleek, prosperous Christians sometimes still sing:—

"'Tis weary waiting here,"

and from the bottom of her heart she realised its true meaning, which they, perhaps, often fail to do. Still, there was her music, and, at the thought, she fled to the huge piano which blocked up so much space in her tiny morning-room. The long, spare fingers wandered lovingly over the keys, and her voice broke into one of Rossini's divinest melodies.

Professor Owen, still intent on those studies which have so greatly benefited the world and increased our knowledge of nature and of God, once almost despairingly wrote to a friend: "I still hope to resume the delight of hearing—

"'The lute well touched, and voice divine Warbling seraphic airs and Tuscan song."

Laura turned round to greet a sweet young voice and a radiant face, for Rose had returned from Lady Ann's party in the highest spirits, and delighted with all she had seen and heard.

"Oh, mother, if you had only been there! The new Italian violinist, whom we heard of in Brussels as playing in Milan, played three times, and Miss Davis recited, and Miss Parmenter, the novelist, told me she saved up her money to be able to go and hear you sing, and that she heard you the other night in *Dinorah*."

"And Lady Ann? was she nice and kind to you?"

"Most affectionate, as she always is. She made me sit near her after luncheon, and introduced me to several young men, not particularly interesting, but all very agreeable."

Rose belonged to that very numerous class of young ladies to be found, it is said, in every rank of life, who are most amiable and agreeable, and even amusing, when they are in a vortex; but, in drifting away from the rapids, until they reach the humble village stream (with ultimate hopes of the duckpond), they grow dull, gloomy, silent, and sometimes even peevish.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE end of our earthly journeys no wise man attempts to foretell, and poor Stone came back from his stay at Venice alone and broken-hearted. He and his daughter were on their way home, resting at Rapallo, on the Gulf of Genoa, when the summons came to his young daughter to leave this world. She had died, after a few days' illness, of virulent typhoid fever, and the poet took his solitary and stumbling footsteps back towards the empty house in Harley Street.

As he sped through the mountain tunnels, and beside the blue Mediterranean, in view of the winter haunts of the British and American idlers, one desire alone oppressed him, and that was to get home and, when he had reached home, to see Philip Fitz-

Herbert. There was no other man in the world at that time he could have endured to see but him. They had often taken "sweet counsel" together, they had often discussed the great mysteries of life and death, they had mutually wondered at the seemingly cruel tests of faith which it has pleased Providence to appoint; they took, as we know, in matters of doctrine a very opposite standpoint, yet they were so far agreed as to the mysteries of this life and the faith as to the future, which removes mountains, that Stone, who had been exulting, until this blow fell, in the great success of his Elizabethan Writers, only longed once more to be in Philip's company, to listen to Philip's sympathetic voice, to read together once more that fine gem of ancient literature, "The Book of Job." For Stone, for the moment at all events, felt like Job, and forgot his little literary eccentricities and his supercilious view of the uncultured and the Philistine.

So, when he was once more in the book-

lined sanctum in Marylebone, he appealed Minor Canon, telling him all to the that had happened, and asking him to come and see him. Philip was much affected when he read the story of the poor girl's end, in a lodging at a foreign watering-place, and when he read further. between the lines, the desolation of the father's heart. It was like him to throw aside everything for the moment and to hurry to his friend's side. Yet of Stone, the author, the poet, the idealist, Philip had seen little for more than a year, since the time, indeed, when he had helped him to put up the famous west window in St Mary's Church.

Stone had a volume of his beloved Wordsworth at his side as Philip entered, but he was not, outwardly, in the least altered, or worn, or aged. "He had borne the journey," the housekeeper had said in the hall, "extremely well."

"My dear friend," he said as he clasped Philip's hands, and with a dim, humorous smile pointed to the book near him, "still the poet, and not the Bible, but I waited for you to come and open the Bible. Look, Philip, at the old lines:—

"'But she is in her grave,

And ah! the difference to me."

"A beautiful grave it is, quite close to that lovely sea, but I shall never see it again."

In a lovely picture by Burne-Jones, which hung just above the bereaved man's head, Philip found and breathed his consolation. He extracted a promise from Stone to make the rectory his constant home, to come whenever he liked, and to look upon them as his dearest friends.

Stone was, we know, a man of many friends. He had found piles of letters inviting him to stay quietly in country houses, offering to come and remain with him as long as the writers could be of use, and sympathising in a manner which was profoundly genuine. Still, it was to Philip he turned more than to the men

of genius, more than to the fellow-poets, more than to the women who yearned now, so pitifully, to secure his happiness, and heal his wounds.

There was one person who felt some pangs of conscience when her brother told her all. She felt, perhaps, she might have prevented that fatal journey to Venice; and, as is the manner of our simple race, concluded that if the journey had never been undertaken the poor girl would have been living now. She knew she had not been very kind, or perhaps even as courteous as she should have been in her later intercourse with their friend. In reality, she had dreaded that he might make serious proposals to her, and it was for those proposals she was not prepared, and to avoid them she was, consciously, stiff and reserved when she had met Mr Stone. But now she felt the greatest pity and commiseration for him, with a little pang of regret on her own account.

Ellen had recently had many admirers, though she was growing rather older, both in appearance and manner, as well as in her view of life.

There was the young gentleman, for instance, whose enemies thought him obese, and whose friends voted him devout, who always wore a blue tie and long hair, and who devoted himself to many of the ornamental as well as useful duties connected with the services at St Mary's. This young man, nearly ten years Ellen's junior, had long manifested his passionate admiration for the Minor Canon's sister. He sat next to her in church. he furtively regarded her through his fingers at prayers, he picked up her umbrella, and rescued her prayer-book. She, obdurately, gave him not the slightest encouragement, and without even a glance from her limpid blue eyes it was impossible for so young, and so nice, and so shy, and so girlish a lover to make any serious advance.

There were others, at least so said the head verger, who had for years successfully practised the manners of the modern archdeacon, as he conceived them to be, changing with chameleon-like celerity from the "gay to the severe,"

from the artificial smile of welcome, to the doctrinal frown of an ecclesiastical dignity, which declines firmly to be compromised. But there were numerous admirers, too, in every sense, outside the church, and Ellen still less encouraged these. She began to think, as her brother had always foretold, that she would die an old maid. And yet it seemed to her, on the other hand, that it was essential to Philip's happiness that he should marry, and that the only really efficacious way of securing that result was that she should leave him quite alone. Then she felt sure he would make his choice, for solitude, she thought, was really an impossibility for him.

The more she considered the matter, the more clearly did it seem her duty to marry, for Philip's sake. In the life which lay behind them both now she remembered so many young and fair women and girls who would gladly have linked their future to his when that future was, necessarily, uncertain, for Philip had always been fascinating and interesting to her sex, as he had always been handsome and likewise clever. Now that

his experience of life was deepened and his position in the profession he had adopted secured, now that he was well known in London and had the reputation of becoming a future bishop, no one could doubt that a wife would be easy to find even if he had attained what is called the prime of life, and not without its crow's feet and its grey hairs. But all the advice in the world would never influence him. He would end his days a childless, solitary monk, unless Ellen married, and she had, all her life, been so habituated to consider others, and to thrust aside, as of no importance, her own wishes, interests, pleasures and prejudices, that she arrived speedily at the conclusion as to what she owed to her brother's life and happiness.

On what the possible change might mean to herself she did not bestow much thought or consideration. In the meantime, Stone, who was only a year or two older than her brother, was constantly at the rectory, and often at the church. He presented Ellen with his new volume, bound in morocco, and with an inscription from him. Afterwards, in an agony

of nerves, he explained to Philip that perhaps it contained some madrigals with too great a flavour of the age in which they were written for Ellen's refined taste.

"Perhaps," said Philip, cruelly, "she will never read them, the outside of the book is so absolutely charming."

But Stone was not humble enough to accept such a suggestion.

"You really talk," he said demurely, "as if it was a volume of sermons. This is a serious, historical criticism, and, as the *Spectator* thinks, one of the best of the time." And Philip saw, with obvious delight, that his friend was beginning to be himself again.

"Do you like Stone, Ellen?" said Philip, one night after dinner, when they had dined alone, and the maid had brought in their coffee and left them to their newspapers and books.

"Of course I do. He is a very old friend of yours."

Philip paused, as was his wont in têteà-tête conversation. "Yes, but I mean do you like him very much."

Something in his manner startled Ellen.

"Now, what do you really mean, Philip?"

"I mean," he said deliberately, "that, so far as I can see, from what he has said to me, Stone is going to ask you to marry him."

Ellen blushed and made no reply.

"What do you think?"

"I think a man should make his own proposal to a woman if he has decided to do so."

"But it is so humiliating for a man no longer quite young to be refused when he asks a young lady to marry him. A boy soon gets over that temporary mortification, but a man like Stone is bound to be a little careful of his self-respect."

Ellen turned to her newspaper, and no more was said.

Philip had not forgotten what Stone had decreed about the one love of a man's life, and he did not wonder at any human inconsistency, or even feel sure that Stone's

present feelings deserved that name. The man was alone, and he was intensely sympathetic and social. He saw in Ellen—had long seen—an intelligent, lovely nature, a woman full of grace of mind and person. Still, that admiration, that respect, that desire to make her his wife was not necessarily love, and still, the man with that view might make for Ellen the very best husband and the very best friend, until death them should part.

To do him justice, he never thought of himself, and he never realised that Ellen would possibly think of marrying in order to drive him into the happiness she had planned for him.

The end was, of course, that Stone proposed to Ellen in the fondest and most poetical terms, and Ellen, clasped in his arms, told him gently she believed that they would both be very happy.

CHAPTER XIX

When the wedding was over and the joyous bells had ceased their London clamour, and Ellen had waved her adieus from the carriage window, and Philip had tried, so far as he could, to realise Stone as an actual and not a possible bridegroom, the inevitable reaction fell upon the lonely brother as he re-entered his disordered house. The last tie was now severed, so it seemed to him, the last link with that not altogether happy past.

He had often thought of the refuge from the anxieties and sorrows of the world which the Catholic Church had always, in its wisdom, provided for the weary and the sorrowful. He had not reached that milestone in his career yet, though more than one of his old Oxford friends had disappeared in the monasteries to be now found in almost every county of England.

No! "Forward, forward" was still his motto, and alone, if necessary; without sympathy, or companionship, or approval from the outer world—still forward on the march. Nevertheless, he had not known until Ellen went to grace another home how much he had lost by her departure. She had, in a hundred ways, soothed his path of life, welcomed him home so tenderly, and provided him with all those carefully-chosen little refinements, without which, to some men (and Philip was one of them) a house seems to become a prison cell.

On the other hand, there were many who only superficially knew Philip, and who thought Ellen's marriage an excellent event for her brother, as Ellen, as we know, intended it to be. Lady Ann Vain, for instance, after reading the account of the wedding in the newspapers (for all weddings are now publicly described, except these of undeniable distinction), was heard to say,

"A most uninteresting person she seemed to me. Well, she has secured her 'precious Stone,' and leaves her delightful brother much more independent and desirable. I have never asked him formally to my house, simply on account of the sister, as I did not wish to annoy him by asking him without her. Now it is all simple. He must, at first, feel lonely, and I shall ask him at once to luncheon on a week-day, not on a Wednesday or a Friday, but on a real week-day, when he may conscientiously enjoy himself."

But before that important invitation could be sent, the Minor Canon had been asked to preach at a great commemorative service, to be held in the presence of many members of both houses of the legislature, and, it was whispered, of royalty itself.

The war had practically come to an end, and services were being held all over the country in thankfulness for this long-looked-for termination. It was a singular compliment to Philip that he should have been asked to preach before such a congregation. He fully recognised the im-

portance of the trust thus confided to him, and he shut himself up, night after night, composing a discourse which would be suitable, as he thought, to the distinguished audience, the memorable occasion and the historical church where he was to deliver it.

As we know, Philip was an original thinker and a man of great courage, and, quite unlikely to be in the least conventional on such an occasion. Nor was he. The astonishment, not to say consternation, of his congregation can be imagined when, instead of one of the stereotyped verses from the Old Testament, redolent of the Jewish wars and their terminations, he gave out as his text, in his singularly musical voice, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"'See God'—now what does that possibly convey to the human mind? It does not allude primarily to a future life. The pure in heart are to see God everywhere here below, in their daily life, in their habitual intercourse with men and women, in their travels, in their literature, in their science. They are to see Him in the suffering, and the

dying, in the poor and the wretched and the disappointed, in the rich man giving of his bounty, in the forlorn wretch dying by the water's side. They are to see Him when all seems darkest, in the hour of tribulation for themselves, and they are to see Him in the long, brilliant summer days, in the frost-bound glitter of an Arctic winter, in the songs of the birds, in the sighing of the winds, in the lightning from the sky.

"They are to see Him, too, even in the battle-field, of which so many of us are thinking now. The God of battles is the Guardian of the pure in heart, to Him, in Christian panoply of strength, many a bright young hero has looked before he shed his life blood for his country's sake.

"It does not seem amiss," went on Philip, with the energy of conviction and the gestures of a Lacordaire, "to speak of the purity which sees God in the midst of a vast city steeped in impurity, in a society where marriage vows grow laxer every year we live, where the divorce court seems a portal of escape from honourable and legiti-

mate happiness to the outer darkness, and where shamelessness is a constant illuminant of deeds and thoughts, once always, at least, shaded from prurient publicity. But the deeds of heroic gallantry, the self-denial, the long endurance of pain and hardship, without a murmur, the sacrifice of their lives by those who had every human reason to wish to prolong them in luxury and the enjoyment of God's earthly blessings, who have left titles of honour, and, in many cases, great wealth to their heirs, with an example far transcending in value every other asset they possessed, at least assure us that the pure in heart not only see God here, but shall see Him in the many mansions for which they have left us. sorrowing and desolate, watching the light on the horizon, and praying for that purity of mind which is as much referred to in this text of Scripture as the purity of body."

Of course, his sermon, from which these lines are extracted, was considered generally unorthodox and, however eloquent, not quite adapted to the occasion, which clearly demanded a more patriotic tone and more local and military colour.

"The worst of FitzHerbert is," said the archdeacon, privately, afterwards, "he always seems to wish to castigate vice in season and out of season. An excellent object, no doubt, but there are other things to be considered in a sermon, especially a sermon commemorating a national event. Some allusion to the view of the Church towards war generally would have been very opportune; it is always a most interesting theme of discussion and review."

The archdeacon himself was a healthy and ruddy example of the Christian minister with Erastian tendencies.

The huge congregation kept its place until certain great personages could make their exit to their carriages without confusion, but even they, or rather their servants, did not escape the Sunday criticism.

Lady Ann's powdered footman at the door watched the scarlet-liveried servants turning round the corner, and announced his opinion to a fellow-servant that "it really was too gaudy. I shouldn't care myself," he said, "to be dressed up in a scarlet uniform, unless I was in the Guards." But Lady Ann came next, looking, as usual, very distinguished, but as if she had stepped out, by mistake, from a fashion-book of long ago, or as if, which we know was really the case, she had long outlived her own and even her mother's generation.

"Come, Dovedale," she said, as his lordship joined her at the door, "I will drop you at the club, and, of course, you remember you are coming on to luncheon with me afterwards."

He nodded, and followed her into her brougham.

"Well," she said inquiringly, "what did you think?"

"He is always a little sinister in his sermons. I do not know any other word to express what I mean."

"The imperialistic conscience, of course, will not be touched," she said, "by that sort of discourse. But I admire him so

much, he is so original, so very brave. After all, what clergyman in a thousand would dare to attack such an audience in London as to the purity of their lives? And it must arrest the conscience of many of these smug donors of enormous sums, it must suggest to them, for once, how the money was made which they now so ostentatiously give away. The Publican, I suppose, never looked round as I did this morning and beheld innumerable Pharisees. His sermon was partly for them."

"Anyhow," said Lord Dovedale, "the Prime Minister was there. I suppose you saw him in the side aisle, sitting down, and listening with obvious interest."

"Then, I hope, Mr FitzHerbert will be made a bishop. If he is, I shall attend his consecration."

"Do you think any Dean and Chapter in this country would appreciate FitzHerbert, or even, after a time, keep on friendly terms with him?"

"My dear, I am a Philistine myself in the matter of convention, as you know very

well. My sympathies are entirely with the Minor Canon. When my daughter was young and simple, and had not blossomed into her ideal of a grande dame, she and her governess, on Sunday evenings, sometimes persuaded me to join, after dinner, in their pious games at Stratham. 'Now, mother, who is your favourite character in the Old Testament?' They gave it up at last. I was so monotonous. I always answered, 'Ishmael,' and Dorothy thought me stupid, as she still does. I am going to ask Dorothy to meet the Minor Canon when next I go to Stratham, or even before. She is devoted to the Church of England and cannot refuse. I need not mention any other of the guests. 'The famous Canon FitzHerbert' will bring both her and her husband to Stratham."

"Au revoir, Lady Ann; mind you ask me too, and one or two others, of course. The shocking of Lady Dent is an old comedy, and I do not think it will come off, Lady Ann, unless you are exceedingly wary and diplomatic."

The old lady laughed in her dry way.

"To think," she said, as he got out of her carriage in St James Street, "that I should have to devote my octogenarian years to shocking my own daughter."

But clever women like Lady Ann do not always give their convictions away, they do not always formulate their opinions until they have ranged their thoughts in order and even waited for them to crystallise. In reality, she was profoundly touched by the sermon. She thought, as Stone had thought many years ago, "That man has a story and he never entirely gets away from it. Perhaps he never will."

CHAPTER XX

PHILIP had received a delightful letter from his sister, dated from Cadenabbia, redolent of happiness and of interest in her travels, in her poetical husband, and her own unselfish desire to look at scenery, at things in general, including mountains, lakes and valleys, exactly from the particular standpoint which Stone, from long experience, recommended. But to Philip, somehow, the letter brought a note of bitterness and dissatisfaction. It was absurd, he thought, that a man of Stone's learning and middle age should use such extravagant expressions as he had added to his bride's letter. It saddened him a little, being only too human, to think that Ellen had passed away out of his horizon, and that her beautiful nature would influence someone else in the future, instead of him. But he answered the letter in his brightest vein, and he turned to dissipate his gloom on that Tuesday afternoon towards Lady Ann's house in Curzon Street, where he was bidden to a quiet luncheon.

Lady Ann apparently was not visible when he first arrived, and walking through the rooms, admiring the beautiful French modern pictures which decorated them, Philip suddenly perceived that he was not alone. A young lady of remarkable self-possession, and beautifully attired, advanced towards him.

"Lady Ann bids me say that she has been detained, but will be here in a few minutes. I am staying with her just now for two days, and I must introduce myself. I am Miss Villeneuve."

She glanced with some timidity towards the clergyman, whom she knew perfectly well by name and by sight. He had bowed, and did not seem disposed to be very affable, but she saw at once that he was looking at her very attentively, with curiosity, with interest, even with admiration.

He could scarcely have been deprived of

the last manly privilege. A more beautiful girl than Rose, with her fine, expressive eyes, tall and bounteous figure, instinct with health and spirits and early womanhood, could not have been seen. It was not an intellectual, much less a spiritual, face. Hers was not the manner of Lady Clara Vere de Vere, but she was human, and natural, and strong in a way that compelled interest and demanded some form of worship. The Minor Canon saw it all. He had put away from him, for many long years, the consideration of the love of fair women, and it was not likely, as he thought, that he should ever retrace his steps. He spoke patronisingly to Rose.

"I suppose," he said, "meeting you in this house, you must be the daughter of the great prima donna."

She laughed girlishly.

"Exactly, and you are the most famous preacher in London, Canon FitzHerbert."

There was something in the clear, distinct voice of Rose which recalled to Philip's mind some memory of the past. But he

could not remember what it was, and while he was trying to evoke some similar voice from the phantoms of the past and of the dead, a rustle of satin and lace announced the advent of Lady Ann, attended by the second poet of the age, who had just arrived.

"I see," she said, holding out her little hand, covered with lace mittens through which the diamonds sparkled, "I see, Canon, you and Miss Villeneuve have introduced yourselves."

"Lady Ann, you left us no alternative," laughed Philip, "and, in this house, if report is true, all friends are intended to be mutual friends."

He could have said nothing more delightful to the old lady.

"Exactly. This is a social republic, and you are warmly welcome to it, Citizen Fitz-Herbert."

The Clerk of the Council rushed up from Whitehall, and the party of five was complete.

Philip sat between Rose and his hostess.

The second poet beamed at the young lady, and regarded, with a critical air, the popular clergyman, whom he had never seen before. He was an anti-clerical, and was mentally measuring Philip's head. It seemed to him such an unusually fine, intellectual one for a clergyman, but not much imagination, he concluded in his thoughts; an ambitious man, who had probably mistaken his vocation, but was determined to adapt himself to it, and rise to the highest position to which he could attain.

Then, suddenly, finding himself rather left out of the conversation, he regarded Rose. She was not quite the style of beauty he personally admired. But her youth and gaiety appealed to him, as to others. It was delightful to a man like himself, full of great thoughts and tender sentiments, and noble similes and conceptions, as he imagined, to see one so young, so pretty, so thoughtless, so fascinating.

But Lady Ann found him dull, and rallied him at once.

"The new poems," she said, "and when

are they to be here? I have been expecting my presentation copy for three months. Come and tell me in the conservatory."

The Clerk of the Council followed them. It seemed to be Philip's destiny that day to be left alone with Rose Villeneuve. She led the way coquettishly to a distant sofa, and there they awaited their coffee, and talked of art, of music, of the interesting people whom she had met in London since she arrived there with her mother.

Philip succumbed to the influence of the moment.

"I am old enough," he thought, "to dispel the idea of romance in any woman, and surely I may talk, at my age, without the suggestion of flirtation."

But at what age does a man cease to be fascinated by a beautiful woman, at what age, in either sex, does sexual attraction die, and when, and in what circumstances, is to be found the man who can be pronounced safe, free for ever from the madness which has made the world what it is?

Philip thought, of course, he was safe,

and inoculated for all time. Yet we know that the disease of love, as a certain philosopher held it to be, is more violent, more tenacious, and far more dangerous in later life than at that period when, like Sterne, we imagine ourselves to be always in love.

Rose promised to come to St Mary's. She confessed she did not always go to church on Sundays, as she was often alone, and her mother was generally too tired to get up in time to go with her.

She would have an inducement now, she smiled, "because I shall go to hear you preach."

Such innocent flattery is soothing, and contains no element of sin.

"The girl," he thought, "was perfectly candid and simple, most charming in every way. If she comes at first to hear me, she will stay and pray, and forget about me."

But the Council Office was coming to an official standstill in the absence of its clerk—so Mr Grimston explained as he rose to go, and, with his departure, the little côterie broke up.

Lady Ann took Rose's plump arm in hers.

"I am going down to Stratham next week. Everything is over here now, and I am to take waters in the Vosges. But I shall stay at Stratham a fortnight, and I hope you will be able to take a little holiday and spend a week with me. This young lady is coming, and my daughter, I hope—a quiet party, but you will not mind that."

Philip hoped he might manage to get away for a few days. He could not take his real holiday until September, but he might be able to be away for part of a week.

"I will write and let you know the day," she said.

He looked up into Rose's eyes to say good-bye. They were full of life and fun and expectation. They reminded him of the eyes in an old minature by Cosway, which always stood on his writing table.

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Rose liked him, and told Lady Ann so, quite innocently, as soon as he had departed.

"So do I," she agreed. "But then always, as a girl, I liked middle-aged men better than young ones. They amused me more, their experience interested me, and their savoir faire helped me so comfortably and so cheerfully on my way, which, I am afraid, was sometimes rather a giddy way. Still I married a young man. I am not sure if the experiment succeeded, but I think, on the whole, my dear, I should recommend to you the young husband. He may be selfish and extravagant, and even not very constant. Still, he will grow old with you."

Rose was laughing at Lady Ann's serious tone.

"I shall never marry," she said firmly, with all the determination of a thousand Christian virgins at the Pagan stake.

"I consider that remark simply fatal," said Lady Ann. "Any young girl of eighteen who says she will never marry, and in that tone of voice, will have

husbands in succession. You had better marry the Minor Canon at once if he asks you."

Rose coloured, for Lady Ann was so very direct in her allusions. Other people wrap up their innuendoes; but Lady Ann considered herself privileged to send them home just as they were.

"So, I hear, your mother has a brilliant engagement for the winter in New York. I think you must persuade her to let you stay with me while she is away, unless, of course, you wish to travel, as most girls would with such an opportunity. But then you are not like the modern girl. I wonder why, Rose."

"Travelling is not my idea of amusement. I dislike the sea, I get so weary of those long day-and-night journeys, of the endless rattle of the train. I like my amusements to be at hand, and, in short, I am horribly lazy. Mother says so, and she is quite right."

Lady Ann was going to her bankers in the Strand, a pilgrimage she only made twice a year, and where she was always received with almost royal honours.

"When I cared for the respect and admiration of the world in my salad days," she often said, "I used to measure my success by the solemnity of that reception at the bank. The senior partners had all been brought up with a sense of veneration for my father's memory, they had all been told of his great career, his extraordinary knack of acquiring and amassing money, in spite of a life which history has declared to have been extravagant. So, when his heiress fluttered in, as a young woman, the senior partner was sent for, the clerks were in an agony of excitement and curiosity, the aged head porter stood like a guardsman at Then I began to realise it all, attention. and how important a customer I was, and, as the years went on, I knew by the deference of a new generation that I had not turned out a failure; I had proved, from a financial point of view, a worthy daughter of my noble father. The comedy still goes on, but the clerks are old men, the senior partner is dead,

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the grandson of the old head porter watches me from the door with astonishment and admiration. They are all wondering how long I am going to live and who is to be my residuary legatee. Alas! who can tell?"

CHAPTER XXI

LADY DENT sat facing Sir George at the charming little oval table covered with old Worcester china and the spoils of September roses, not only, indeed, facing him, but smiling at him. Here indeed were a happy couple, of outwardly archaic simplicity. No religious or political problems ever confronted Sir George's extremely wellbalanced judgment; he had long since formed his convictions on all subjects on which it was desirable for him to have any; he had long since come to an absolute conclusion as to his own great social importance in his county, and of the extraordinary good sense, good looks and good manners of my lady. His literature was the Times newspaper, his Eldorado the business room lined with guns, fishing rods, heads of foxes and

defunct dogs, and his religion was Church and State. But even to such persons as Sir George and Lady Dent, as we know, in their prosperous passage through a world more or less arranged for their convenience, surgit anari aliquid, and the letter from Lady Ann, wishing them to meet the Minor Canon at Stratham, involved a strain of doubt and anxiety, which clearly is included in that elastic commonplace of Horace.

"I really do not think that mother could ask her usual Bohemian set to meet a canon of the Church. Even in these days there are social limits. I am told Canon FitzHerbert is far from orthodox, but, as a dignitary of the Church, it would be an insult to ask all kinds of horrors to Stratham to meet him."

Sir George was a man of few words. He was always absorbed in his wife's magnificent individuality, but he managed to say, with a pomposity which most successfully suggested anxious consideration,—

"Let us go. We have not seen Lady Ann for a long time. It is perhaps our duty

to go, and, as you say, it is probably, under all the circumstances, at least a respectable party."

Lady Dent still held her mother's letter in her hands and still apparently pondered. Hers was the ruling spirit. It was considerate of dear George to give his opinion, contrary to his almost invariable custom, but still it must always be for her to decide. To the outsider, and the unfashionable man or woman, it would have appeared a natural thing to accept an invitation to a mother's house; and, as Sir George and Lady Dent had no children, and especially none of these female jewels which parental judgment puts in such iron-bound safes, it would have seemed unnecessary and almost a waste of time to think at all about it. But Lady Dent never wasted time. She was busy with her crochet while she considered the trap which her mother might perhaps have laid for her and the county magnate. It was quite possible that Sir George might find himself at dinner next to Marie le Noir, the great serpentine dancer at the Empire Theatre, and that she herself might be taken down to that meal by one of the Brothers de Rouge, of the London Hippodrome. Still, the Minor Canon, as Lady Ann had hoped, appeared as the redeeming angel, and Dorothy Dent wrote to accept her mother's invitation, limiting their stay to five days. "For the clergyman might go," she thought, "and leave us at mother's mercy there."

Sir George never went to Scotland, and he had, of course, only partridges to shoot in Norfolk until the middle of October. His arrangements for his various "shoots" in September occupied much of his time at least a month beforehand. There was an extraordinary novelty to him, every year, in these often-made plans. The same men were asked every year, the same guns, the same fields, the same keepers, the same turnips, the same dogs were there. But to him, most happy of men, Cleopatra was not so various, Browning not so obscure, Shakespeare, or even the Times newspaper, not so attractive as were these yearly events absorbing in their interest.

"I can spare just five days and no more," said Sir George, a fortnight before the first of September. "It is a most inconvenient time, of course, for me," and he rode away to mumble off commonplaces, and appeal to his clerk for common sense at the County Bench.

Lady Dent was a personage who never travelled without an appanage, and a corresponding fuss and flutter. To begin with, her departure was duly chronicled in the county and London newspapers, the train was always specially stopped to take up the party at the roadside station on Sir George's land, and the usual servants of the most refined type were seen into their places by the first footman, who, even in the country, was obliged to wear powder.

Lady Dent thought, and perhaps not altogether unwisely, that in a democratic age the outside of the platter should be kept especially bright and even glittering. The adoration of and respect for wealth, she considered, should be carefully fostered at a time when successful tradesmen were elbow-

ing the county families in so unpleasantly a familiar way. The Dents were rich, as well as of ancient descent, and the combination being, in these days, rare, should be enforced in the most punctilious way before both Cockney and yokel.

So the porters retreated before her, and the simpletonian station-master bowed and scraped, and the guard blew a most deferential whistle, and the signal dropped with abject humility. It was a royal progress to the destination of Gamblegay—that nice place about which Lady Ann had uttered so many wicked witticisms for so many years.

Sir George looked out of the carriage windows as he drove from the station, through Lady Ann's park, but Lady Dent gazed steadily before her. There were no new features about Stratham to the woman who had been born and bred there, and there were, undoubtedly, some painful memories.

In every human heart there must be an ounce or a drachm of sentiment, of feeling, of sad recollection, but in Lady Dent's case the compound was distinctly homeopathic in quantity.

"It seems to me there are not so many deer as there used to be in the park," she said at last.

Sir George made no reply, and showed his fine judgment therein. Who should say how many deer there were in the park, any more than how many Bohemians might be found in the drawing-rooms?

At Christ Church, long ago, it had been decided that he was not numerically gifted. Two and two made four, and that was all he had to say about it.

In another five minutes they were in the blue drawing-room, with Hoppner's famous picture of the Prime Minister and the ladies of the family standing round in the lovely draperies and the graceful attitudes in which Gainsborough had once depicted them. Amongst them, still in this human life, though more like a picture than a living woman, sat Lady Ann, wrapped in priceless lace, amongst which, here and there, a diamond ornament glittered—a concession

to modern taste — and at her side was Rose Villeneuve, while Lord Dovedale stood in the corner, and, with a humorous smile, watched the meeting of the two generations. Lady Ann stretched out two fingers to Sir George and drew her buxom daughter simultaneously to her arms.

"At last, Dorothy, you come once more to see your poor old mother."

Lady Dent was on her best behaviour. She kissed her mother's white cheek, she bowed cheerily to Lord Dovedale, and she looked inquiringly at Rose. But Lady Ann took no notice. She intended to reserve Rose as a bonne bouche for her daughter, and Philip coming in at that moment, in full and correct clerical attire, Lady Ann presented him with all the formality of a Lord Chamberlain.

Unfortunately, the Minor Canon was a man of quick intuition and strong sympathies. He took Lady Dent's proffered hand, and arrived instantly at an unfavourable estimate of that lady's calibre and character. He was not in the least imposed upon by her grand manner, her affected cordiality, or her London drawl. He saw in her, he thought, a worldly, vain and somewhat unscrupulous woman, who would have been ambitious had she not been constitutionally indolent, and a schemer, if there had been anything left in this world which she did not possess.

"Delighted," she said, with a fleeting smile, "to meet you at last, and in the country, where one can really enjoy conversation and improve an acquaintanceship."

Lady Ann looked across at Dovedale with rather a triumphant air.

"You see," it seemed to him to say, "I have succeeded," and she at once, and with *empressement*, presented Rose to her daughter.

"Miss Rose Villeneuve, the daughter of our prima donna."

Dorothy Dent bowed rather stiffly. From the housekeeper's chattering letters to her own maid she had, long since, heard of the Villeneuve faction, but she scarcely glanced at the girl, who was perfectly self-possessed. "May I have tea in my own rooms, mother? I am so very tired. It was such a hot journey."

Lord Dovedale flew to open the great gilded doors.

Lady Ann kissed her hand. "What is the proper translation," she asked Philip, as the door closed, "of semper eadem? Does it mean 'as disagreeable as ever'? It occurs here in the new novel, which everyone is reading, about Ritualism."

"Perhaps," said Philip, "it refers to the Catholic Church—a reference to the famous essay in Macaulay."

"Or 'The Scarlet Lady,'" said Lady Ann, laughing. "It depends how you look at it."

CHAPTER XXII

THE advent of a French attaché from Albert Gate somewhat raised Lady Dent's drooping spirits. She had been acquainted with him ever since he had been in England, and though she was never known since her marriage, or indeed before, to carry on a flirtation with any young man, still it was pleasant to find someone she knew, and who knew her own friends.

Philip, too, found new interests in his developing friendship and admiration for Rose, who seemed to find in him, middle-aged as he was, a sympathy and intelligent comprehension which had never fallen to her lot before.

Sitting one evening near the ancient yew hedge, which is one of the glories of Stratham, and watching together the sinking of the sun behind the house, in all its autumnal splendour of green and red, and pink and gold, Rose, for once, sighed.

"You see," she said, "my mother naturally takes such a different view of life to mine. She was early separated from her family, so I have very few relations, and, of course, her great professional success absorbs all her thoughts and efforts. She is going to America next month, and perhaps I ought to go with her. Lady Ann has asked me to stay here. Do you think I ought to do so, or to go with mother?"

Philip considered, remembering his own mother, and, of course, he knew nothing of Madame Villeneuve's life or surroundings.

- "Do you ask me," he said, with his handsome smile, "as a clergyman or as a friend?"
 - "As both," she answered.
 - "And from a selfish point of view?"
 - "Oh! of course not. That is impossible."
 - "Well then, take what the gods provide; if your mother really does not care to have you, accept the goodness of a most agreeable

hostess. She will certainly make you happy and see that you are well looked after."

But the fact was, Philip's mind was being gradually opened to possibilities which he had never hitherto realised. He had so caged himself professionally, morally, even physically, that it had never occurred to him he might wish to peep out, to wander forth, to live a natural life, to fall in love and to marry as other men did. It seemed to him. in the last few days that, after all, he was "as other men," and that this wild girl, Rose, was capable of inspiring him with all the passion and devotion of a much younger lover. In addition to her beauty, the freshness of her mind greatly attracted and delighted him. She always took the simple and natural view of the world in general, and she always exposed, if necessary, her own inclination to the gayer and brighter side of life, so long as it was possible, acknowledging, at the same time, with a shadow on her bright face, that no one could be really happy whose conscience was not clear, and who did not feel he or she was doing some good to others. Her theology might be defective, almost certainly was, but then, Philip's was not without reproach, as we know, from the most orthodox view. And who thinks of theology when love is in question?

Lady Ann asked that night at dinner if Dorothy had been to church for "the vespers." The clergyman at Stratham always read the evening prayers on Fridays.

Lady Dent said "no" with some asperity, as she disapproved of these services in a small village.

"At all events, Dorothy, you must go to-morrow and see how well I have restored poor Matthew Kemp's tombstone. You must know," she said, turning to Philip, but in reality talking to her daughter, "Kemp was one of my father's oldest tenants, and there were at least four generations of the family here on the same farm. Matthew Kemp died a rich man, and indeed he did what is impossible now for a farmer to do, he founded a family, which has long since migrated to London and to Surrey. Before he died he

desired that the distich which is now on his tomb should be placed there after his death. It is wonderfully simple.

"'No more of rank, or lands, or cash
When you, with me, art dust and ash."

"You should look at it, Canon."

The attaché thought, "Matthew Kemp must have been a *drôle*." But Lady Dent was absolutely silent. She had often regarded the grave in question, in her youth, with absolute disfavour.

"There is no great originality," said Philip, laughing in spite of himself, "in the inscription, is there? except, of course, in the fact that he had founded a family, as a farmer, and even so, was apparently discontented."

"All farmers," said Sir George, laconically, "are discontented."

But no one denied it.

"As for originality," went on Lady Ann, "how can there be any left? The world is far too old for original ideas, or new philosophies, or even new stories. The best we hope for is a new dress, a new framing, a

new stage representation. I myself am so old that I never read a book, or see a play, or even hear an opera, without recollection, however dim, intruding its horrid self."

But Lord Dovedale would not hear of this.

"You yourself, Lady Ann," he protested, "are always saying good things and new things."

"Only preserved," she laughed, "like the tinned things the poor soldiers and sailors grow to like."

"Anyhow, I am content with my portion here," he said. He said it with an air of resignation which was irresistibly ridiculous.

"Well, contentment," said Lady Ann, "is a great point in the game of life, but what I was lamenting was the impossibility of what the Oxford freshman translated from the Greek as 'a new tie.'"

"But why not be content with the old one? Do you remember the story of the Bishop of Winchester, in the early Henrys, who went away to Paris, not at all appreciating the Dean and Chapter, who had at first refused to receive him? Well, in Paris he lived, as tradition says, a very unedifying and entirely unepiscopal life, and died early in that city. But he desired, in his last hours, that his heart should be sent back to Winchester to be buried, and this was done."

"I understand," said Lady Ann, gravely. "I never remember, Dovedale, your indulging in parables before. People are too restless, as they always were, too anxious for new experiences, and new aspirations and sensations. But in the end their hearts go back to Winchester."

It was a brilliant autumn night, and the harvest moon flooded with light the beautiful terraces at Stratham. Some of the party ventured out after their coffee, and amongst them Rose and the Minor Canon, pacing towards the end of the great conservatory, whence a view is obtained of the lake, now shimmering in the silver light.

"I will get a shawl," said Rose, suddenly,

"and meet you at the boathouse. It will be perfectly delightful on the lake for a quarter of an hour, and nobody will miss us if we go at once."

There was one person who always eschewed nocturnal rambles, moonlight nights, and other risky adventures, and who should this be but Dorothy Dent, who remained with her mother, watching the flitting figures outside. They had been silent for several minutes. Lady Ann always felt somewhat tired after the exertion of talk at dinner, and between her and her daughter the subjects of conversation were not numerous.

"It seems to me," at last said Lady Dent, "that Mr FitzHerbert is falling in love with your young protégeé."

Lady Ann sat up.

"You really think so," she said rather satirically. "But everyone admires Rose, and that is all his attention means."

"Indeed, I should have thought, at his age, it meant a good deal more."

Lady Ann raised her finger.

"I shall call you 'Detective Dorothy."

Lady Dent's temper was never under strong control.

"Of course, mother, you can sneer if you like, and what takes place in this house is, naturally, not my affair."

"Exactly," said her mother, with rather aggravating emphasis.

"Still, I have some respect for the Church of England and her dignitaries, and I should be sorry to hear of one of them marrying the daughter of a professional singer. It might cause scandal, you know."

Lady Ann did not reply at once.

"It is a long way to marriage. To talk to a pretty girl, even for a clergyman, does not mean, necessarily, to propose marriage to her. Pray do not distress yourself about them."

Lady Dent, with some abruptness, left the room, and sought her husband in the billiard-room, where, as she expected, he was playing pool with some of the men. The French attaché did not play billiards, and, finding the terrace chilly, joined Lady Ann as her daughter left her. "Ah! mon amie," he smiled, showing a very brilliant row of teeth, "in my country the bishops do not make love. They do not marry, but they may not even make love. Formerly, yes, but not now," and he shrugged his shoulders. "Your bishop here makes love to mademoiselle."

"He is not a bishop," said Lady Ann, pettishly. "He is only a Canon. He can do what he likes."

"He is on the lake, rowing in a boat with mademoiselle."

"Go down, if you please, and tell her to come in at once. Say I said so, and that she will die of rheumatism or lungdisease. Bring her back at once."

He flew down the terrace.

"I punish the spy. But probably he is too self-conceited to understand that I meant to inflict the most humiliating of all punishments upon him. Is he jealous, or only stupid, or both?"

But he came back without having found the two delinquents.

"You have seen the ghost," said Lady

Ann, cheerfully. "The ghost here is sometimes visible on the lake, moving among the shadows, a thin, ascetic monk, with a girl in white on her knees, apparently imploring his aid. It is a melancholy family legend, but I have not heard of it until to-night for some years. You must not think about it, or you will have a restless night, and it really does not portend any evil to any of us."

The attaché did not look happy, and seemed quite prepared to cross himself.

"Let us go into the billiard-room and dispel our dreams." And there they found all the house party, including Rose, playing pool exceedingly well, and the Minor Canon with his cigarette, looking on, and Lord Dovedale and Sir George. Only Lady Dent was absent. She had sent word to her mother that she had a bad headache, and had retired for the night. Lady Ann nodded and watched the game.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I was told once by a famous bishop, who had been on intimate terms with George IV., that a man ought, naturally, to think of his sins as he rides home alone in the darkening twilight on a winter's evening from the cover-side. His lordship was a middle-aged, but a wonderfully well-preserved, handsome man, whose inclination was, I believe, even to the end of his days, towards the good things of this world. As a girl, I could not restrain my occasional outbursts of fun, and I remember saying in reply, 'I am afraid he thinks more often as to what sort of dinner awaits him on his return.'"

The speaker was still Lady Ann sitting in a garden seat in the clear golden light of autumn, in that exquisite early September with which England is sometimes favoured.

"I am sorry we all part to-day. It has been pleasant to me to have you all around me, and to-morrow I start on my long journey to the Vosges. But why talk of the past memories to me? I am sure you have no past in the modern sense? Rose says she loves you. She told me so this morning, and I nearly boxed her ears; I am sending her back to her mother to ask for maternal consent. You must not be a woebegone lover. If you have gained her love, how much more difficult to retain it!"

It will be seen that the intimacy between Lady Ann and Philip had rapidly grown and increased. That was always a peculiarity in Lady Ann Vain's character. She was never familiar, even with those she liked and admired, but they, insensibly, became intimate without realising to what a great extent.

"Rose is most charming, most delightful, but I feel I am too old for her, too serious, too time-worn, and my profession is probably not the one for her husband."

"All that will right itself. The difficulty is Madame Villeneuve. I have seen her once only off the stage, and she struck me as a difficult person, not easy to persuade or to influence—in short, a trifle hard. Perhaps," said Lady Ann, with a smile, "she will make a bargain; she will talk of settlements. I am told she is very rich, and that she saves two-thirds of her income. But tant mieux some day for you, two."

Philip hesitated.

"I dared not ask Rose about her father. I suppose he is dead."

"I should regard him, now and always, Mr FitzHerbert, as a negation and a cypher. He was, probably, a worthless person, who behaved badly and does not deserve to be remembered. Leave him out of the question. I never heard who he was. Such fathers often have beautiful daughters, with surprisingly fine natures, replete with all the noble qualities which were pater-

nally wanting. But ask no questions, if you will take my advice."

"There are others, of course, who will."

"Ah! of course, there are the inquisitive Sunday slanderers in your congregation. You must gain them over to your side, and Rose ought easily to be able to do so. I think, too, they are in a minority. St Mary's has a liberal reputation. The very fleecy, long-tailed sheep of snowy whiteness have sped to other folds. I am afraid your mission is mostly to the cultured, the agnostic, the man whose profession leads him, necessarily, among the evil and the careless, the woman of literature, who writes down what she knows, and the hero of the stage, who has, long since, learned how to play a poor part in life's eventful history. These will not condemn a man for marrying a girl young enough to be his child, and whose paternity is in doubt, when they know she is the daughter of the great singer of the day, and her fiance a preacher of genuine earnestness, in 'the wilderness of this world."

"How eloquent you are, Lady Ann," said Philip, with great gratitude.

"Yes, but too long. It is the common error of old age. And now good-bye. Rose has departed to London, and here is your conveyance; write and tell me all. Good news will cure me sooner than all my horrid baths."

Lady Dent, in her saloon carriage, enveloped in rugs and surrounded with newspapers, speeding on her homeward journey, neither slumbered nor slept. Sir George would willingly have done so, but he was given no opportunity. Her indignation was not of that special kind, often described as speechless. On the contrary, she was extremely angry, and at the same time most voluble.

"A more unpleasant visit I do not think I have ever made, even at Stratham. Can you imagine anything more disagreeable than to be obliged to witness a disgraceful flirtation between a dignitary of one's own Church and the daughter of a public singer; to be, as it were, an accomplice in one's

mother's house, while such an abominable intrigue is going on."

Sir George imagined nothing. His eyes, somewhat bleared and very colourless, were wandering over the turnip fields and the hedgerows, among which the train was passing.

- "Extraordinarily little cover," he muttered, "in the Midlands this year."
- "What do you think, George, it is our duty to do?"

So appealed to, Sir George loudly blew his nose.

"Nothing," he said firmly.

It is wonderful in this puzzling world of ours how often the stupid man is right.

"Do you object," he asked, with most unexampled verbosity, "to a parson marrying a wife? And, if not, why should we care whom he chooses to marry? He isn't our own parson, so what on earth does it matter to us? and even if he was, why the blazes should we care?"

Lady Dent shuddered at this moral revolt.

"Did you take any notice of the girl?" she asked; "did you speak to her?"

Sir George positively chuckled.

"I told Lady Ann she was a dangerous little witch. I know that sort of girl, as killing as a well-tied may-fly; and she has hooked a big fish, though rather an old one it seemed to me."

"Your metaphors are beyond me," answered Lady Dent, with supreme scorn. "I shall wait and see what comes of all this. My mother has grown so old that she fails to see how she lowers herself and us by allowing her house to be made the scene of this kind of affair. Fortunately, there are bishops and deans who can be appealed to, and scandal may thus be prevented. We shall see."

But Sir George, having mentally quite settled the whole arrangement for his partridge shooting on the morrow, and having delivered his opinion on Philip's love making with a courage and decision which even astonished himself, had fallen into profound sleep, and Lady Dent, deprived even of one hearer, fell into a reverie, which, oddly enough, was devoted to the character of the Minor Canon. How could a man of his years, and character, and clerical repute, fall suddenly in love with a young girl of eighteen, brought up, no doubt, in a careful manner, but in a home which must of necessity have been Bohemian, and with no family associations, and, above all, herself probably illegitimate?

Lady Dent was convinced that she was a keen judge of character, and, upon reflection, she decided that Philip was not what he had so long appeared to the world to be. He was evidently a man of strong sensual feelings, although he posed as the modern apostle of purity of life. The girl, no doubt, was extremely pretty, and, to men, very possibly attractive—to men, that is to say, whose ideals of womanhood were poor, and whose imaginations were gross. Naturally, the mother would be delighted at the possibility of so soon marrying her daughter respectably to a husband of position and ability. There was, of course, even Lady

Dent mentally conceded, more than one precedent, and a marriage of the kind against her will occurred to her, which had been a most successful and happy one.

Perhaps if Rose had not been so entirely adopted by Lady Ann, she might have taken a more lenient, merciful and womanly view. Lady Dent was very fond of money, although she had more than she could spend, and it did not seem desirable that her mother, at the end of her life, should adopt fatherless young ladies of undeniable good looks, and bestow them in marriage on visitors to her house. It seemed to suggest a dowry, and Lady Dent thought the whole thing scandalous. Poor woman! she need not have fretted or troubled herself so much, even about her own concerns.

In spite of the impostors and the hypocrites, and the blasphemers of Scripture, whether of this generation or of those long passed away, and forgotten here, it is certain that "the Mills of God" still grind on, however, to human comprehension, slowly. The wicked deed which worked so much

evil in its day does not die with the autumn leaves, it is avenged at the right time, in the just manner and by the unseen hand, when descendants, who never heard of it, wonder at the event which is its righteous punishment. But Lady Dent was content with her own generation, combined, of course, with a reverence for the family pictures.

CHAPTER XXIV

LAURA had long prepared herself for that inevitable moment when her daughter would come to her to announce a proposal of marriage, and to ask for some explanation of the circumstances of her existence. She had faced this probability, as she had faced so much else in her hard and sorrowful life, and she had decided that, when the hour struck, she would tell Rose all that it was necessary for her to know, and no She would have all the shame, all the possible contempt, all the alienation, but her humanity showed itself in this, that there were one or two points in the story which she had always resolved to omit.

Rose had telegraphed she was returning

at once, and her mother guessed with natural instinct that her daughter was coming to tell her of some love-affair, possibly even a proposal of marriage.

"He is nearly as old as you, mother, but so handsome, and so clever, and so dear in every way. He means to come and see you as soon as you give him permission, and tell you everything himself."

Laura was in the little drawing-room with the verandah where the honeysuckle still struggled to survive, and here and there a late rose lent its fragrance through the open window. She kissed her daughter, whose eyes were sparkling, and who looked more handsome than ever.

"But you are so incoherent, my darling," she said, smiling at her own emphasis; "you have not yet even told me who he is, or his name, or his profession, if he has any."

The girl was almost panting as she threw her hat on a sofa, and walked out into the garden, to be cooled by the effete September breeze of London. "He is a clergyman," at last she explained, "the vicar of St Mary's, and a minor canon. You have seen his name in the newspapers—Canon FitzHerbert."

"But to be a canon—even a minor canon—he must be old," her mother wondered, in a bewildered way.

"He is about forty," said Rose, "and has the manner and appearance of thirty."

"I see," said Laura, thoughtfully.

The difference of age seemed to her, at first, perhaps too great, for she was well aware of the instability of Rose's nature—and then a clergyman—

She sighed, recollecting that, long years ago, her own father had also been a clergyman of the old-fashioned Evangelical type, who had disowned her in her day of shame, never seen her again, never even helped her to live, and then had died himself of a broken heart.

Yes, there was no objection in the fact that Rose's lover was a clergyman. There are so many types. Perhaps FitzHerbert belonged to the best type, perhaps he would make a model husband, and the very disparity of years turn out to be an advantage, in the influence and control which, combined with a steady affection, might make Rose a happy and a contented wife.

She could not doubt that Rose was in love, for her eyes, and her expression, and her shy note assured her mother of this. Well, then, why hesitate?

"I do not see, at present, any objection. Write and tell him to come and see me. I shall be delighted to see him, Rose," she added with greater warmth.

"He never asked—you must not think he ever asked—but I should like to tell him about my father. After all, it is only right and fair that he should know something about my family. I do not wish to pain you, mother," for Rose had noticed that Madame Villeneuve had grown ashen pale.

The moment had come, and, though long prepared for it, as has been said, it came, as death always comes at last, with a shock.

She bowed her head in acquiescence as to the right of inquiry.

"The story," she said, "is a distressing one, full of shame to me and of pain to you. Are you sure you wish your future husband to hear it? If so, he shall from your own lips."

Rose answered, "Yes, if you please."

"Then to begin with, you are illegitimate. Your father and I were never married. He deceived me, and he had assumed a false name. I do not know, I never have known, his real one. Probably he is dead. If he is alive, no doubt he is married. must accept the fact that you have no father. Then, as to my relations, they long ago discarded me. My father was, like your lover, a clergyman, and I was his only daughter. He could not forgive my disgrace, he abandoned me to the world, and my mother was dead. I determined to earn my own living, and to support and bring vou up as best I could. The struggle, even you may remember, was a long and a hard one. I did my best to atone for

my sin. Then came success, and now wealth. Well, dear, I hope you will be happy."

The girl's heart was, at last, touched by her mother's misery and the cruelty of the semi-confession she had extracted. At last, she saw all in its true tragical light. "Poor, poor mother!" and she burst into genuine, if hysterical, tears. But Laura was perfectly calm, self-collected, and even distant now in her manner, when all she chose to tell was told.

"You can tell him all this if you like. I will see him to-morrow, and there will be business, too, to discuss. It is not likely that he and I will have much in common, or that, after his marriage, he will care to see much of me. But we need not think about that. Tell him to come and see me to-morrow."

It was not quite the interest which the mother generally shows in the first offer of marriage to her only child. Rose felt the difference, but she could not have explained it. She was quite aware that her mother's

heart was with her music, with the art which had taken possession of her being, full of her approaching journey to New York, and the prospects of her prolonged tour in the United States. Rose forgot that she herself had not been a very affectionate child, that she had often repined at her rather lonely and very friendless life, that she had shown little or no gratitude for the many years of self-denial and determination which had all been spent upon her. She forgot that the moment she had an opportunity of living in another world, and enjoying the society which Lady Ann Vain gathered round her, she eagerly seized the chance of living away from her home. and her mother, as much as possible. She had never tried to be a companion to her mother, and now she had accepted the first offer of marriage which ever had been made to her. But Laura had moved away into the room which to her was a chamber of music and melody.

The first part she was to take, on the other side, was Marguerite in Gounod's Faust.

She sat down and began to sing the famous 'Jewel Song.' Her sad thoughts, still full of the past, which she had been abridging for her child's benefit, seemed to give her new power and pathos, new depths of feeling and enunciation, and she sang the song better than she had ever sung it before. Pandori had noiselessly entered unannounced, and he listened with parted lips and in a dream of abstraction. When she had finished, he murmured something, and she turned round to him with a smile.

"Eavesdropping, Pandori. Oh, for shame!"
He noticed that her beautiful eyes were
full of tears, and he knew that his own
also were clouded with the emotion which
her splendid voice always evoked from
him.

"If you sing like that, madame," he said, "you will have the greatest success in America that has ever been known. It is too heavenly."

"When do we go? The time is getting short. The steamer leaves Liverpool in a fortnight, and I am such a miserable sailor. I ought to have, at least, a week to recruit before I sing after landing. Can that be arranged?"

"Everything," he said with deference, "can be arranged. But does mademoiselle accompany you?"

"I do not think she will. I believe she intends to be married, and so she will be left behind."

Pandori shook his head. He was one of those singular persons who do not believe in the advantage of being married. He himself had been, it was said, not very successful in matrimonial ventures, and he never failed to throw cold water on the enterprise of others, of either sex, in that direction. Still, he thought, from Madame Villeneuve's professional point of view, it would not be undesirable that she should be perfectly free from any family ties or responsibilities, and that her daughter's marriage would be an advantage for the unfettered devotion to her art.

She took her daughter that evening to see a gay little musical comedietta, and

Rose thought she had never seen her so cheerful, so amused, so free from the preoccupation of mind which had grown with her life. She even took Rose to supper, and discussed the wit and humour of the dialogue and the songs with almost youthful enthusiasm. Rose was amazed, for she had never on any occasion seen her mother so entirely abandon herself to the gaiety and amusement of an evening. It seemed almost phenomenal.

As they drove home together in her mother's brougham, she put her hand into Madame Villeneuve's.

"I have been so happy," she said artlessly.

"So have I," was the astonishing response. And long years afterwards, when many changes had come to pass, when youth had passed away, and the inevitable troubles and sorrows of later life had broadened and deepened Rose's nature, and made her understand some of the problems of existence, when death had brought its inevitable darkness, and the shadows

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deepened and religion beckoned, Rose never ceased to remember that evening with tender gratitude and a remorse which brought her hope and faith in that world which, we are told, sets this one right.

CHAPTER XXV

ALWAYS self-contained and reserved, there was, nevertheless, one man whom Philip would have liked to see that beautiful. sunny autumnal morning. There was one man to whom he would, at that crisis of his life, have unbosomed, at last, his real and inmost self. He would have told him all, he would have described his early life, his strangely disadvantageous surroundings, his inadequate preparation for the necessary temptations of youthful manhood. would, so he thought, at least have "nought extenuated."

In the conventional manner, he would have presented his conscience and soul, absolutely naked, to the father confessor. But the father confessor, though on his way home to the parish of Marylebone,

was still far away, still pointing out to Ellen hitherto unrealised beauties of scenery, still drawing, for her benefit, on his stores of antiquarian and historical knowledge, still idealising, dreaming, loving, as if he was yet a young man, instead of an old poet, oblivious of a philosophy which he, even now, would have maintained to be as sound as to other people in his case it appeared to be obviously shallow and inexact. So the confessor being impossible, Philip, whose resolution had never for a second faltered since he parted from Rose, set out on his afternoon walk towards the north of London.

The first part of his journey was, of course, across Hyde Park, where the leaves were now fluttering down, after a morning frost, in their silent, suggestive way. To Philip they suggested many memories—his frequent walks with Ellen in their mother's lifetime, when the happiness she seemed to have secured now in her life was a thing remote and apparently unattainable. The solitary autumnal walks which had been

habitual to him in early life outside Oxford, and later on in his rural clerical period, came back to him somehow on this day with great distinctness—his reveries, his solitude, his aspirations, even his sins.

He had made up his mind never to marry. As a clergyman he had been inclined to the Roman view, and he had thought that celibacy must necessarily save a man from much worldly care and anxiety and secular interest. And now he was on his way to arrange his marriage with the daughter of one of the greatest singers of her day—a girl more than twenty years younger than himself.

Where were his resolutions, his convictions, the strength of character which he was always impressing on the young men around him as so necessary to success and selfrespect?

The leaves still fluttered around him. There is not a moment of our lives, if we turn that way, when decay and resurrection may not suggest their inevitable lessons, and Philip turned most naturally to resurrection. This was the beginning of the

new life, the new ambition, and the new awakening. With Rose he could face even the recollections of what she would never know, and share with her the hopes, and, if necessary, the sorrows the remaining years of his life might bring.

He had, unintentionally, somewhat wandered out of his direct route, and, crossing that long, melancholy road which it is difficult now to believe was once surnamed "new," he found himself quite close to a gloomy hospital of Georgian record.

An unaccountable impulse made him stop to look round to see how far he had wandered. That hospital conveyed nothing to his mind. He had always known of its existence, and believed it to be a useful and well-endowed institution, whose charity was especially extended to poor women who had no home in their time of trial. It looked the same as it had looked for fifty years—just the same as when Laura had gazed, in her weakly convalescence, from the little square window towards the woods of Highgate, towards the church of Hamp-

stead—just the same as, when years afterwards, she had looked up from that endless stitching and sewing and working with her weary hands the machine which gave her bread—just the same, ah, yes! no doubt, as it had appeared to thousands of toilers, of sinners, of weary dwellers in the great city, who passed it every day of their lives.

Philip hastened on. He had taken a long time to walk even so far, he had still a mile to go before he reached his destination. There was no time to be lost. His destiny was at stake, and all his natural energy returned as, striding along the road, he remembered the many, many happy days he had spent watching the cricket close by, and playing himself in the public school and university matches.

The arena, of course, was deserted now, but, as his journey came near its end, Philip's heart bounded with joy, and he seemed to hear the applause of the past. At last he stood at the little wooden gate, as another and more famous Apostle stood long ago, and gazed at the carefully-tended

garden in which the dahlias made so brave a show.

There came a pause—an involuntary pause—before he lifted the latch. It was the pause which many a man has made as he breathlessly stood at the turning of the ways, at the gate opening to the new era, at the black door on which mortality is inscribed. But the Minor Canon at last heard the merry click of the garden latch, and walked through the line of lingering flowers to Madame Villeneuve's door.

There is not, indeed, a great variety in the construction, or even ornamentation, of this type of house. The small square hall, with its tubs of geraniums, its photographs of all the European musical celebrities, led into the double drawing-rooms, decorated with the many gifts which had been, so profusely of late, laid at the *prima donna's* feet. The music-room lay beyond, with its well-used piano from the Emporium of Brussels, but there was a piano also in one of the drawing-rooms, and cases of various musical instruments were strewed in different

directions. They were left there by those members of the orchestra who journeyed up to Madame Villeneuve's villa for private and extra rehearsals.

There was only one peculiarity about the rooms. They did not contain any portrait or even photograph of their owner. Laura had always declined Rose's strenuous efforts to make her mother sit for her portrait. Photography she rather disdained for herself, so it seemed likely that her face and figure would never descend to posterity at all.

As Philip gazed round the rooms with some curiosity, wondering if their contents would suggest to him anything of his future mother-in-law's taste or idiosyncrasies, the lady herself, in her long black spangled dress, glided into his presence. She advanced towards him with a smile which, always evanescent, had even yet a peculiar sweetness of its own, and she held out her white, artistic hand to welcome him.

Suddenly there came into her large grey eyes a frigid stare, her cheeks blanched to the colour of death, her graceful body swayed to and fro, and the words her lips had already formed were absolutely frozen. She looked like a person who had suddenly beheld a ghost, some spectre of the past, emerging from a cloud of reminiscence, gazing out of a generation which was past, as she had believed, forever. A gesture seemed to say, "What is it? What are you? Whence do you come?" A great amazement, a terrible apprehension, an agony of conviction seemed to shake her entire frame.

At last she saw, she knew, she realised all. Philip looked with the greatest astonishment as he thought of this marvellous actress and still beautiful woman. It never occurred to him that he had seen her before, though he saw there was a likeness between the mother and the daughter whom he sought as his wife. He was the first to speak.

"you probably know my errand. Rose must have told you. She promised at Lady Ann Vain's house she would be my wife,

subject of course to your consent, and I have come to ask for that."

She turned towards the window for a moment, apparently recovering a composure which had seemed to be in danger.

"It was all drama," he thought, and she seemed, with her feminine intuition strained at that moment to its very furthest point, to have divined his mood.

"It is all drama," she said, turning towards him with a face contracted with the great effort she made, and with an expression of inexorable sternness, which had swept away every vestige of tenderness or interest, "but a drama you have forgotten."

He still could remember nothing, but he began to think that Rose's mother must be insane. She now stood as she often stood on the stage—a great pose of intelligent womanhood—absolutely still. Still passion was gradually gathering in those strangely-compressed and handsome features.

"But a woman never forgets," she went on, as he watched her attentively. "I have never forgotten, until this strange meeting, so utterly unexpected and unhoped for between us two, has come at last."

An agonised exclamation, a groan of despair, did not now arrest her voice, eloquent in its despair and reproach. He had sunk into a sofa and covered his face, but his sob would not have been audible to anyone but her.

"At last," she laughed wildly, "after so many weary, despairing years. Once, worn out with drudgery and degradation, hopeless and unchristianised, in need of bread, and looking in the future to a cellar and a workhouse grave, I cursed your memory-I did not know your name—and called on the God, in whom I was ceasing to believe. to avenge my wrongs and protect the child at my breast. That child, man, was yours, as you well know. That child was brought to life through public charity in a public hospital. That child you deserted, repudiated, abandoned to any fate, no matter how horrible, how bestial, how cruel. But the child lived somehow, struggled on, and the mother braved everything to keep the breath

in its body. She wore her fingers to the bones, she starved herself to procure nourishment for the poor little mite, she wandered from house to house, from shop to shop to procure employment, from early dawn until the morning broke again. You have never realised, though you preach to others, what such an existence means, what it is to watch the blue veins on the pinched, contracted features, to stint your own daily meal, to cry to the doctor whom you cannot pay for the help which no one else can give. I wrote to the address you had given me, and, of course, I never had a reply; I never expected one. There was no help for me in God or man."

Still she never broke down. Her voice vibrated in its exquisite melody even when she upbraided him. She only waited a moment from absolute exhaustion.

"But now," she went on, with icy satire, "you appear once more. The storm is past. The woman has triumphed. She is rich, she is famous, she is far beyond all those miseries and discords, and anxieties, which

are for her only a piteous memory. But this time you make love to her daughter the girl she has saved from misery and from poverty. Wretched man! do you not see your infamy and God's retribution? You have proposed marriage to your own daughter!"

She sank into her chair, but still there were no tears, no hysterical cries. Laura was an implacable judge of the lover who had deceived and deserted her. "The quality of mercy" was not for her.

"I am not a religious woman. I have only done my best in a life which, even now, has no great charm or attraction for me. It was you who prevented the possibility of all that, even before I had attained to womanhood. It was you who cursed, who darkened my life, sullied my nature, destroyed my soul. What can you do now? Nothing. But, at least, in mercy, leave us alone. Go on preaching, become a bishop, establish a new faith, or grow to be a beacon of the old one. But, at least, leave your victims alone."

He had slowly risen and faced the famous prima donna, who never moved her eyes from him.

"Much of what you say so bitterly no doubt is true. But if tears and prayers and repentance could have availed you anything, they have all been yours. And you are prosperous at all events, and I am broken-hearted, and probably ruined, certainly humiliated beyond all hope of recovery. But it does not matter so much for us now. What of this poor girl—poor Rose, so doubly, trebly wronged. Can nothing be done to help her?"

A look of scorn passed across her face.

"You need not be afraid," she said; "your daughter has inherited your temperament, not mine. She will forget us both. In any case she will forget you as a lover. She will marry someone in another world, someone rich, with rank, perhaps, and position. She is one of those who will obliterate her past, and condone the sins of her parents by wiping them out of her memory."

For a moment there was a tear in the

big grey saucer of her eyes, as she realised the gratitude and the devotion to which she never could lay claim.

"Will you tell her?" he said with some anxiety.

"I shall tell her all, and she will go to Lady Ann and throw herself on the old lady's compassion. The world will soon know all. You are, no doubt, an object of envy and jealousy to many, like all successful men. They will repeat the story, they will exaggerate it, they will print it."

The moment had come to part. It was impossible to keep up the strain very much longer. Philip felt that all he had hoped for, prayed for, worked for, was now a mere heap of dust and rubbish. There was nothing left to him but disgrace and ruin. His humiliation was so great that he would gladly have walked out of those rooms, every object in which was stereotyped in his memory, until the end of his existence, without one word more. His expression, be it reverently said, was that of the thief in the masterpiece at Antwerp.

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But there was no Divine Master to promise that anguished, imploring sinner a hope of Paradise. Inexorably relentless and unforgiving, the woman who had throughout her lifetime been wronged could whisper no hope of forgiveness to the man who, in all his abasement, still held himself as one who only asked for a kind word of farewell.

"We shall never meet again in this world, and, I suppose, not in the next, if indeed there be another. My art is my happiness, and I shall never debase it. My singing is my gospel, which may reach some hearts, when even your sermons are forgotten."

He did not answer. What could he say? He remembered Gehazi. The moral disease was not cured, even by all the rivers of Damascus, and he went out like a leper as white as snow.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Philip reached his own lonely home, rendered beautiful by Ellen, he was a moral wreck, and with difficulty he gathered his recollections together, shuddering as he thought of the terrible scene he had just gone through, and trying very characteristically to adjust, in an impossible scale, the amount of his own liability, and the practical view of his future as affected by a position which, he was convinced, would soon become known to the public. more he thought it out the more confused his mind became. Ought he to write to his daughter, or would it be wiser and better for her that he should utterly efface himself? With Laura, it was clear, nothing could be done. She was rich and independent, with a great interest in her life.

But Rose—some strong impulse in his nature prompted him to explain. But he had been taught that it was imprudent ever to explain. And then his own career. If he had mistaken his own bent, as certainly he had, retribution was, no doubt, imminent. But was it all, he asked himself, to end in this?

For how many years had he lived a life of self-abnegation, of constant thought for the poor and the depraved and the weary? For how long had he practised the most rigid restraint of ever-living impulses of evil, and almost obliterated the strong natural passions which he had inherited without any will of his own?

He had long realised that his choice of a profession had been a deplorable error, one of those fatal mistakes which can never be retrieved. But he had struggled on, he had fought bravely those battalions of the flesh and the world, which, though invisible, be recognised as real, while in his heart of hearts the devil seemed to him a mediæval superstition. And now shame

and disgrace were to come upon him. The sins of his youth were to find him out at last, and, when he had attained success and professional advancement and honour seemed secure, his life was to be wrecked by the sudden revival of a ghost which he believed to have been long since laid.

It was Saturday night, and the next morning that wonderfully intellectual congregation which he had gathered round him would have to be faced, have to be intellectually fed, have to be revived with the new creedless religion which met with acceptance alike among the literary and theatrical cynics of the time and that endless collection of nondescript triflers who only craved for a new view. Yet all these people, many of them with crude ideas of morality, many of them living absolutely irregular lives, would condemn him when they knew the story, simply and only because he was a clergyman, though their own reputations, in many instances, were notorious.

As he stood up in his pulpit he saw and recognised many a man and many a

woman who had faced the divorce court, who had passed through the bankruptcy court, whose names were tarnished with well-known scandals, and who had passed out of the society which even yet in London retains a barrier. It had been his metier to collect such people amongst the nobler majority, and he had Scriptural authority for his effort, and commendation for his success.

How venial had been his own sin! So young, too, when he had fallen in with this woman, now herself one of the best-known singers of the day. But he had deserted her in the days of her poverty, he had never helped in her long struggle, or thought of his child. Every demirep would condemn him, every libertine would cry "Shame;" even the choir boys would shake their heads, and the Sunday-school teacher who had afar off adored him would weep in despair.

But there was one person left in the world who would never abandon him. If disgrace came she would still stand by his side; she would bid him look beyondso far beyond—all these transitory troubles Had he sinned. of an insincere world. she would love him the more. We all had sinned, and he, at least, had repented. Let us be thankful in the day of adversity if there is even one woman left on whom we can implicitly rely for sympathy, for consolation, for love. Ruat Calum! if she is there by our side to pour the oil and wine into those aching wounds. So Philip thought of Ellen and was comforted. He would send for Ellen and tell her all, and she might come with her bridegroom if she liked. Stone's poetical view would not irritate him now, and the man's advice was certain to be affectionate and sound. In an emergency Stone became, as Lady Ann had jestingly once called him, "a precious stone."

In the meantime the diagnosis continued in his brain. Did he love Rose still, or had the revelation destroyed both loves, or was it wrong even to think of these things? It was impossible to commit the sacrilege of thinking of her as a wife. It had, alas! become very difficult to realise her as a daughter. But to-morrow he had his clerical duties to perform, and he must thrust all these speculations and medleys of thought far away from him. But just as he had arrived at that wise and temperate conclusion. Ellen suddenly appeared with her husband in answer to his summons. She threw herself in his arms; and Stone, who was utterly happy, greeted him with friendly warmth. How were these good people to be told of what had happened? and yet they must be told, or, otherwise, they might hear the story from strangers, or from the newspapers.

Ellen listened attentively to all he said, and when he had finished he looked up and saw she was crying. The history had somehow profoundly touched her. She put her arm affectionately on his shoulder.

"My dearest Philip," she said, trying to smile in encouragement. But Stone was absolutely silent and thoughtful. There was very little poetry in this story, though, undoubtedly, there were psychological problems. These he realised without any anxiety to solve them, but the practical view to him seemed to be to avoid publicity, scandal, possible disaster and shame to Philip.

"Keep it out of the newspapers," he said at last. "Avoid scandal by every means in your power. The lady is rich, the daughter is to live with Lady Ann Vain, you only remain, and it is nobody's interest to injure you for the sins of your youth"— Ellen kissed her brother—"and if trouble should arise you know you can count upon us. I shall cling to you, no matter what happens, and I may be of more use, perhaps, Philip, than you imagine."

"At present," he answered wearily, "all I seem to want is strength of mind enough to get through the service to-morrow, to preach my sermon and slink away. You can't help me in that."

"I will preach for you if you like, Philip," said Stone, who had been listening to all that was passing.

"Not orthodox enough, Stone. My congregation would resent it. They call you a Unitarian. I must preach myself to-morrow. Perhaps it will be my last sermon. I seem to have a presentiment that it may be."

"Oh, Philip! you make me miserable," said his sister. "You must not talk like that; you will live to be a bishop. You were not even ordained when this temptation occurred, and your life has been devoted to your religion for so many years. Come and dine with us to-morrow night," and again she kissed him with affectionate sisterly sympathy.

"These coincidences," said Stone, as he accompanied Ellen into the street, "are the wreckers of faith. Granted the first part of the miserable story, not, I believe, a very uncommon one—granted the child, which men of the world would not accept as of necessity, being Philip's—granted your brother's inexperience, youth, impecuniosity in those early days, the influence of his mother and the immaturity of his judgment as an undergraduate, why should this coincidence have occurred so many years

afterwards? Much better that they should never have met again, that he should never have seen the girl; why should Lady Ann have taken her up, and why, of all persons in the world, should she have asked Philip down into the country to meet the girl out of all the hundreds of young ladies she knows? Do you believe in the devil, Ellen? This looks so like his handiwork."

"It does not matter, darling, at this moment in the least what I believe or disbelieve. My brother's career is in danger, in imminent peril, from the malicious gossip of the world. If this story is bruited abroad, hinted at in the newspapers, and told in the clubs where Madame Villeneuve's career is a frequent topic, what remains for him but an interview with his ecclesiastical superior, a reprimand, from which he will never recover, or even possibly a dismissal, and professional destruction. Remember, he was always my dearest and best friend and brother, such a Christian, and such a clergyman."

Stone took his wife's hand and clasped it. "And blessed with such a sister," he said.



CHAPTER XXVII

Lady Ann was really and most sincerely sorry when Rose came and, with many sobs, told her what had happened, especially as she felt herself in some degree responsible for the rencontre between Philip and his daughter. After assuring the girl that her home would always be with her as long as she liked and her mother allowed it (which Lady Ann shrewdly suspected would now be always), and making her pack up her things and come to Curzon Street at once, Lady Ann, half soliloquising, took her own original view.

"There was one way out of it, only one way, worthy of the 'brave days of old.' They ought to have married now. It would not have benefited you much, Rose, but

clearly that was the right course. Your father is celebrated and not very rich, your mother is also celebrated and reputedly very rich. They loved each other in early days when marriage was an impossibility, but now the opportunity has occurred. Where was your mother's savoir faire and your father's Christianity? Perhaps it is even yet not too late."

"It is a dreadful thought," said Rose, "that my own father should have fallen in love with me."

Lady Ann smiled rather impatiently at the phrase. It was such a girlish one.

"You see," she said, "you reminded him so much of the woman he had loved. He forgot the mist of years. He saw his ideal again, and he fell in love once more. It is not so very wonderful, nor so very terrible after all. But as for you, Rose, I have planned out a future for you. There is no hurry about marriage. You will look after me, and, in short, be my daughter. I will find the right man for you, later on, when the hour strikes."

Rose was absolutely silent, and she did not protest.

"There is only one thing I dread," said the old lady, "and that is possible publicity. Your mother surely will be merciful, and not try to damage his fine career. But I fear the *quidnuncs*, the London gossips, the spiritual scavengers, like my daughter Lady Dent, who are always first in the field, with the discerning instinct of the vulture."

In one of those journalistic triumphs of democracy in this great country appeared, a day or two afterwards, a paragraph which Lady Ann, who eschewed such literature, would never probably have seen but for the officious attention of Lady Dent: "We understand that one of the best-known and most cultured of the London clergy, and a dignitary to boot, has, within the last few days, been involved in a scandal, not of recent date, in connection with Madame Villeneuve, of Her Majesty's Opera. A young lady and her intended marriage are mentioned in the case, of which we are likely to hear more later on."

Lady Dent, in sending this extract to her mother, expressed her hope that it did not refer to the young lady she had so recently met at Stratham, nor to the Minor Canon of St Mary's. But, as a country mouse, she could not help asking with playful archness, "To whom could the paragraph possibly allude?"

The difficulty presented to Lady Ann's mind was how could the story have reached Lady Dent, for she had very little doubt that it was her daughter who had supplied the paragraph.

"That is the work," she said to Lord Dovedale, "of Detective Dorothy."

His lordship smiled.

"But I heard it days ago at all the clubs. It does not affect my view of FitzHerbert. But, of course, the ecclesiastics will not hold so lenient an opinion. Hang it all, even if you are a clergyman, or a canon, who of us can bear to have all our past raked up?"

"Not you, my dear, I am quite sure," laughed Lady Ann.

"Certainly not, and I am on FitzHerbert's side."

"My dear godson," said Lady Ann, fervently, "whatever you do, please don't take anybody's cause up in that rash kind of way. He is your nominee, your pet clergyman, and, of course, you will stand by him."

"There is no more to be said," answered his lordship, rather pettishly. "No man who was an absolute saint could have preached those wonderful sermons. No man who did not know the world and your fascinating sex well could have hurled his thunderbolts at them. It was his knowledge and his experience, with his eloquence and his faith, which made me appoint him. And how could he gain his knowledge and experience?"

"It is quite evident," said Lady Ann. "But you will see they will persecute him. They will light the stake, they will rejoice in the martyrdom of a new renegade, they will howl at his infamy. The hypocrites will prevail—they always do in this world, in which I have been too long."

Dovedale looked at her with sincere affection. Her fine nature was so apparent, even in her extreme old age, under all her little artificial cynicisms, in her eccentricities of Bohemianism, in her scorn and profound loathing for the modern Philistine, the bloated plutocrat and the vulgarity of a society which she had so long avoided.

"The girl was not really in love with him. She does not know what love means. He was her first admirer, and old enough to be what it seems he is. The mother is, of course, hard, possibly with excellent reasons, but I scarcely know her. The person to be saved is the Minor Canon, now that the story is known. Your grandfather, Dovedale, was an archbishop. What do you think he would have said? Would he have listened to a rechauffé of the early sins of one of his ablest dignitaries?"

"In those days, Lady Ann, I believe the clergymen were immaculate. I fancy his grace would have absolutely declined to believe rumour, or to attend to gossip. Those were the days after the Flood."

Lady Dent had certainly not exercised much Christian charity, whether she had really inserted the paragraph or not. every letter she wrote she alluded to the scandalous story. To every visitor or acquaintance she opened out her views on the disgrace, as she called it, to the Catholic Church. "How differently," she exclaimed, "would the Roman Church deal with such a horrible incident as a man proposing marriage, unwittingly, to his own daughter! But here, you will see, we shall pass it over-we shall forget all that it implies in the history of the man, and his church will be as crowded and as popular as ever perhaps more so."

Philip, now re-established in his usual panoply of calm self-reliance, went on with his accustomed ecclesiastical vigour in his duties. He flagged in nothing, and, to say the truth, he noticed no difference in the manner of old friends or new acquaint-ances. If he was identified with the objectional paragraphs, it did not seem to affect the opinion of any man or woman

in his congregation. They still crowded in to hear him, they still hung on his lips. He confessed to himself, with penitence, that his forebodings had been all wrong. All the bitter prospect of scorn and upbraiding gradually vanished away from his mind. The world which surrounded him was a tolerant and a merciful one, and how wicked he had been in his evil prophecies as to its behaviour towards him! But. as his confidence returned, and he felt a final relief that his secret was revealed, that the woman who had haunted him as a memory for so many long years had at length manifested herself in the fleshrich, famous and even contented, and that his daughter had become the charge of a clever, interesting and excellent person like Lady Ann Vain, the thunderbolt fell, as it is wont to fall, when all the danger seemed to have passed away.

There came a messenger one day, soon after breakfast, from the dean, requiring the immediate presence of the Minor Canon. Philip rather rebelled at this sudden

summons, which he thought peremptory in manner, though he easily divined its object. Of course he must obey, and he made an appointment.

But Ellen, in these days, came every morning to see him, and presently she tripped in with a book which he had lent her a few days before. She stopped as he advanced towards her. Her keen eyes at once discovered a difference.

"What has happened, Philip? Please tell me at once."

He handed her the dean's letter, which she read.

"I shall go with you. Please, let me go with you. I must be at your side, Philip."

"But what will the dean say? A lady makes his interview with me so difficult for him. How can he say before you what he means to say. It is much wiser for me to go alone."

But Ellen was as resolute as she was gentle, and she was determined to be with her brother in this terrible crisis of his life. She was resolved to speak out if necessary. But she promised Philip to make no scene.

"You may rely on me. I shall be perfectly calm, but we two represent our family, and we are bound to stand or fall together."

There was something infinitely pathetic in this tender bond of love and sisterhood. It had been an alliance of very early date, which their alienation from their mother had tended to strengthen and to purify. All the early difficulties which had thrown them so much together, which had made them conspire so often to save the situation and avert the family ruin with which their mother's insane extravagance had constantly threatened them were still present in her mind.

She never forgot Philip's constant self-denial and thought for her. How often he had given up his country visits, his manly amusements and engagements, to be with her, to save her from ennui and solitude, from their mother's constant grumbling and irritating words and idiotic actions.

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She had heard his first sermon. If there was to be a protest, she should be the first to make it, and the last to raise her voice on his behalf and to justify her confidence in him. Nothing could stop her, and nothing did. So the brother and sister started together to hear what the dean might have to say.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE dean of St Mary's was a man who had gone through many vicissitudes in a long career. He had taken part in many controversies, now almost forgotten, been in the van of the fray which followed the innocent publication of Essays and Reviews, and always maintained his absolutely Anglican view when Roman converts became numerous, and when Oxford was convulsed with the dissensions of the moment.

Rewarded with a deanery by a Prime Minister who had been his life-long friend, and on whose political vagaries in later life he always observed a resolute reticence, he could not have been held by anyone to be a man with a great knowledge of the general world, or with any astuteness or

special intelligence outside the application of priestcraft.

In earlier days he had been eloquent, even vehement, when the occasion came, even minatory when defied or disobeyed. Later years brought a ripe and calm obstinacy which saw only one view, and a self-confidence in his own judgment which challenged the universe.

Entering the beautiful oak-panelled hall, with its many ecclesiastical portraits and its long line of coats of arms, FitzHerbert and his sister felt as if they were approaching some Court of Law which was to pronounce a fleeting judgment on their mutual lives.

The room they now entered was a long, narrow apartment, lined on every side with books and appliances for procuring and for reading them. The afternoon sun, even at this sombre time of year, had found its way through the many windows, and Ellen decided that it was an artistic and a delightful chamber of meditation and repose, rather than of the research and literary work

which a dean, no doubt, may very properly eschew.

The Dean advanced through one of the beautifully-carved doors, and, with a serious and somewhat chilly manner, shook hands with Philip.

"My sister you know?"

"Of course; how do you do, Mrs Stone? I'm afraid I rather wished to see the canon alone, as we have to discuss a somewhat private matter—not, perhaps, entirely suited to a lady's ear."

Ellen had quite made up her mind, as said before.

"I know," she said, "all about the matter to which you refer, and my brother wishes me to be present. We have no secrets, and he has no wife to support him."

The dean appeared for a moment confused. He belonged to the old-fashioned school up to a certain point. He certainly could not bring himself to request a lady to leave his house, or even his library.

"I am delighted," he said at last, "that you should be present, provided you know

the unpleasant nature of our conversation, and if you, FitzHerbert, wish it."

Philip nodded assent, and the dean, with manifest annoyance at this unnecessary display of fraternal confidence, took up a newspaper which he had brought with him into the room.

"Have you seen this paragraph?" he asked.

"It has been sent to me. I have received many letters about it, and I am asked if what it says is true. But I cannot answer the question without reference to you. People are indignant, and ask can this honestly be true?"

Ellen looked towards her brother. He had never appeared to her eyes so handsome, so proud, so aristocratic, in the best sense.

"Perfectly true, in its general tenor, though incorrect in some particulars."

The dean paused, as if some painful echo of the past had distressed him. Perhaps he had had a son who had wandered away, or a daughter who had disgraced him. Philip seemed to recollect that he had

heard that the dean had been unfortunate in his own family concerns.

"Are you sure," he said, as if averting the issue, and turning wistfully to Ellen, "that you wish to remain? There are some beautiful Holbeins in the ante-rooms." But Ellen did not give any sign. "I want to be as impersonal as I can. I do not wish to mention names. I have a letter here from a well-known and respected member of London society, who appeals with great force and affection on your behalf. All this took place so long ago, when you were a very young man, as I make out the story. But the difficulty is the publicity. What a pity you ever entered into Holy Orders!"

He seemed for the moment somewhat incoherent. But Ellen recalled him with great bravery to the point at issue.

"My brother's early history, so far as this episode is concerned, was known to no one, not even to me, until quite recently. His later life of great earnestness and devotion to his Master has been well known



and recognised for many, many years. Every successful man has enemies, and this has been their opportunity in my brother's case."

The dean turned from her to Philip. He obviously resented her intervention.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, with more decision than he had yet shown, "that this publicity in the newspapers and in the gossip of Society must of necessity destroy all your influence in the Church and the pulpit. Lord Dovedale, with whom I have been in communication, takes another view. He says, 'Live it down.' But the bishop agrees with me. It is impossible to 'live it down' where you are. If you really wish to serve the Church, of which you have so long been an ornament, you will not wish to perpetuate a scandal, and this you will certainly do if you do not resign your appointments. I have thought the matter over most anxiously. But I can see no other solution for the benefit of the Church to which we both belong and the religion in which we both implicitly

trust. It is a terrible disaster. It is impossible to say what I feel about it. But everything is bruited abroad. The young lady's position is discussed at the clubs, our profession is scandalised by the linking of the name of so well known a theatrical lady with one of the dignitaries of our Church. Surely you must see it all for yourself."

He had not the reputation of great suavity of manner, and, perhaps, was alarmed at the thought of incurring the condemnation of weakness, which would, of course, be involved by too Christian a view. So he added, with a harshness familiar to his college in his donnish days,—

"In short, I must call on you to resign. The public scandal is too great."

"Of course, you understand," said Philip, with great constraint of manner, "what your request, or your command, if you prefer to call it so, involves. When things have come to this pass, it is better to state facts and their consequences with the utmost clearness and simplicity. I entered Holy Orders twenty-two years ago—that is to say, nearly

a quarter of a century has passed. During that time, or, at all events, since I came to London, I have devoted myself to my work, and have, I may say without any presumption, succeeded in gathering together one of the most remarkable congregations of distinguished men and women in London to attend my services, and even listen to my sermons on Sundays. I have often wondered, as most thinking men do sometimes wonder, of what use to others was my existence, possibly even to myself. It is quite likely, as you have suggested, that the profession was one for which I was not entirely adapted. But I have always taken courage when on Sunday mornings I recognised the many men and women of talent, of literary, social, political, dramatic distinction, who never, when in London, failed to come to me to hear the old truths in a new garb, to drink of the old wine in new bottles. The day came," Philip went on unflinchingly, "when my lonely life grew lonelier than ever. A sister, with a lovely, unselfish and ever Christian spirit, most properly made a home for herself, and, almost at the same time, I encountered in the society of literature and art a young lady of great attraction, who drew me to herself with a marvellous spell, a spell of the past, and an entrancement of the present and a faith in the happiness she might bring us both."

Philip paused, for the dean had covered his eyes, whether from horror or emotion has never been known, and Ellen was nearly unnerved. A scornful, involuntary gesture he could not control swept over him.

"You know, Mr Dean, the rest. The lessons of a public school and a university education have not been lost on me. I have been a sinner, like the rest of my fellow-creatures, and I am still a sinner, as we all, at least on Sundays, most frankly admit. You prescribe my punishment, and I confess that the ecclesiastical seems to me more severe than the Divine punishment could possibly be. You tell me, because the newspapers have raked up this ancient story of a young man's immorality and its

consequences, that I must surrender everything in life. I must give up my profession, my character, my respectability, my income, every ambition yet left to me, every hope I still might possibly cherish; I must go out of my home, my parish, my country, unfrocked as a clergyman and disgraced as a gentleman. Well, if that is the mercy of the Church of England, I certainly have mistaken my avocation, and I joyfully give up my career and surrender my preferments. I will do so in writing in an hour's time."

The dean rose from the ecclesiastical chair in which he had been sitting throughout the interview.

"Remember," he said ceremoniously, "my great point was the publicity; as to the scandal for the Church I take a public, not a private view, of this painful matter. Personally, we have always been friends, and I hope may still continue to be so."

But before Philip could utter his acquiescence, which he probably would have done, Ellen, in her usual habit so meek, so gentle,

so forbearing, rose like a lion to protect, at this supreme moment, the reputation of the brother who to her was dearer than her own life.

"You have scarcely a right," she said haughtily, "to make that appeal, either to me or to my brother. We come of a race—"

But the Minor Canon (to give him that title for the last time) said,—

"Of Christians, Ellen. The pedigree does not matter now. In fact, it never mattered. You have not mentioned the name of Madame Villeneuve, the greatest prima donna of her She will sing now that I have ceased to preach. She will convince when I have long retired into obscurity, and my congregation will listen to her when they only think of my sermons as a memory of long ago, when they gaze, if they ever do, at the carvings and the stained-glass windows and the noble organ, which will be, perhaps, my best momentoes. Non omnis moriar. But the immaculate, and the sinless, and the despisers of humanity, and those who have never known temptation, and the hypocrites

will utterly forget me, and could I wish for it to be otherwise?"

With a frigid bow he gave his hand to his sister, and in an instant they had vanished for ever from the dean's view. He had no impulse, it must be confessed, to call them back. His Oxford experience, when he was master of his college, made him recur to the days when he "sent down" some heinous offender against university discipline. But his mental comment was one of regret on modern times and modern manners. It was among the evils of modernity that everything that should be kept private was always made public, that the newspapers were Americanised, and that it had become impossible to deal privately in private affairs with anyone in an official position.

Philip FitzHerbert was, according to his view, one more victim on that altar, strewed with bones and bedewed with tears and gore—the altar, after all, of so strange and often so cruel a god—the shrine of public opinion.

CHAPTER XXIX

STONE held the view that the good work could and should be continued in London. He implored Philip not to surrender everything. Even if the Established Church was foolish enough to cast away its most valuable workers, its most honest thinkers, and its most original and eloquent of disciples, Philip might still, as an independent, and even a secular leader of men, do great and inestimable good.

The Church of Rome had only quite recently driven out of its fold the one saintly man of science still within her fold, and though he could not have continued to speak from a Catholic point of view, he would have held his lighted torch on high if death had not intervened. Death was not likely to intervene in the case of Philip, a man in the prime of life and in robust health. It

was his duty to remain on in London and still do all the good he could.

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Ellen did not agree, and Philip was far too proud to submit himself to this kind of ordeal. He had already made up his mind. He was preparing for the "long farewell," not to his congregation at St Mary's, not to his innumerable friends, not to his brother clergy, but to England and to Europe, and to all the associations of his early and middle life. He brushed aside, so far as he could, all the sentiment at this climax of his life.

Stone, when he no longer hoped to convince him, gave him letters to the journalistic and literary world at Sydney. Men of far greater eminence than the Unitarian poet wrote to those who were likely to be of use to Philip in a new career and a new world.

Rose had told Lady Ann she wished to make her aunt's acquaintance, and this had been easily arranged. There was not, to say the truth, very much in common, so far as character went, between Ellen and Rose. But both Ellen and her husband showed the greatest affection to Philip's daughter, and they all agreed that there should be no formal leave-taking when the time came for his departure from England.

It was a decidedly gloomy and rather foggy morning, in the latter end of November, when Philip found himself ready to start afresh. He had sold his furniture, and even his books. What would those books do for him now but remind him of what had been, of "the sorrow's crown of sorrow"? The china he had collected for years he sold also, but the miniatures and the FitzHerbert portraits and such few things of family interest as he had inherited or reserved from his mother's creditors, he made over at once and unconditionally to Ellen.

He paid one last visit, at an hour when he was certain it would be empty, to the church where he had so long fought "the good fight of faith," and reviewed his brave array of arguments and convictions against the battalions of doubt and atheism.

What he thought, what he prayed, in that



dark empty church, is not here to be recorded. Yet it may be believed that an angel listened to the wail of a ruined man, who never, even to the last, revealed himself to a mortal soul.

Gradually the mist dispersed, and the great dome of St Paul's appeared above the myriad of houses, rapidly being filled by the daily labourers, pouring up in thousands from the railway stations, from the suburbs. from the coast, from the great centres of residential London. Familiar objects to the denizens of the East End of the great city gradually became distinct, amidst the bursting of fog signals and the shrill whistles of the trains creeping up to Fenchurch Street and Liverpool Street Stations. church tower loomed out of the darkness. The electric light of the lamps went out as if by magic. Lost women peered out curiously from patched-up windows muddy streets, and men, with furry caps and of inconceivable ugliness, leered at the growing light with a distaste, explained in the Bible more than nineteen centuries ago.

As Philip passed in his cab through the east of London towards the London docks, where his steamer awaited him, he felt, not for the first time, the impotency of the good in dealing with the evil, and that after all there was something not altogether melancholy in leaving such a conglomeration of mystery and hopeless struggle behind. At least Sydney would present a new sphere, there would be a new setting even to the most malignant and most repulsive of human problems.

He was quite alone at his own request. He had dined with his sister and her husband the previous evening, and they had parted as if for an hour or a day.

The sun had now asserted its power and lighted up the river, the great port, the countless warehouses, the churches, the historical Tower.

As he gazed down from the side of the enormous liner about to convey him from one quarter of the globe to another, and curiously watched the human ant-heap of workers completing the cargo of the floating

palace, his glance fell on a little group who stood with their eyes fixed upon him, and upon him only, of all that bustling crowd. He waved to them with brave insouciance. There was the woman who loved him best of all human creatures, and her husband, who had entreated him to remain. But another figure emerged. He wondered for a moment who it was. Then he recognised Rose. Lady Ann had bidden her go to see the ship depart. His love—his daughter—the cause of his ruin—she fluttered her lace handkerchief. And then he saw she was crying.

There were loud shouts, and creaking of machinery and straining of ropes. There were agonised faces, and smiles and tears, and stern, hard-set features. The great ship glided on, and was lost to view amid the masts and the mists.

The risen apostle of the Church had sunk to rise no more in the profession he had chosen. The low, dispiriting Essex coast faded away, and the great ship vanished like a ghost with its human freight on its silent road.

CHAPTER XXX

Two years had passed away, but the eyes of Lady Ann, like the patriarch's of old, were yet undimmed, her wit yet sparkled, though she confessed to Rose, who was always now with her, that to look back upon her long eventful life was like studying history.

Would she ever emerge from the weary earth-lit tunnel, and breathe the crystal ether of the Elysian fields?

It was Sunday afternoon, and still the musical and the artistic world crowded into the beautiful rooms in Curzon Street. Lady Ann sat now in her big gilt chair, and did not flit, as in former days, from one room to another to welcome her many guests. They came to her, and those who

knew her best ranged themselves round her to listen to the musicians of European fame, who were all in London in this flaring month of June.

There had been a recitation by a rising poet who had only just left Oxford, but the merit of whose compositions had been duly recognised in the most reliable of weekly criticisms.

The second poet of the age listened with approval. He was growing old, and was beginning to realise the blessed acquiescence in the coming fame and glory of another and a more brilliant generation. He had outlived rivalry or jealousy, and had never seemed so lovable in Lady Ann's eyes.

"We all have our day," he smiled to her, "and while Byron is unread and forgotten, Miss Austen is restored to her pedestal, and the genius of Richardson is about to be analysed."

"A little late," said Lady Ann; "but then I sympathise naturally with late things. I wonder if the signorina would honour an old lady, and sing 'The Last Rose of Summer,' with an Italian accent."

"What has become of Madame Villeneuve?" asked Grimston in a whisper, when the music ceased. "She began her triumphs so late that one dreads to hear that her voice is failing."

Pandori smiled.

"She has made a large fortune, and she has married a millionaire of Chicago. She sings still sometimes in Paris, and at Milan; this spring, she sang for an Italian charity. But her career has practically ended with her marriage. The venerable pork packer has no soul, but his diamonds are priceless."

But Lady Ann did not join in the conversation. A woman who gave up her divine gift for a prosaic marriage had no interest for her, and Rose belonged to her and not to her mother. She had practically adopted her and secured her an ample fortune.

At this moment Lord Dovedale came in, and approached her with an interest which at once suggested to her vivid intelligence some exciting telegram at the club, some news of the recent troubles in the Orient, the latest gossip about the presidential election.

"What is it?" she said, with all the sparkle and interest of a girl of eighteen. "Has something really happened at last?"

"I hurried here," he said confidentially, "to show you a paragraph in the Sunday newspaper. Can we get away from this crowd?"

He gave her his arm as she rose rather stiffly from the majestic chair, and she guided him to a retired corner.

"Read it to me if you please. I grow blinder every day."

So he read it to her.

"A curious story reaches us from Perth, Western Australia, where a clergyman, once well known in London, and who suddenly gave up his preferments, and without any reason abandoned London for Australia, has, we understand, been editing for some time the leading journal of the colony. This

gentleman, whose name is FitzHerbert, has, it appears, owing to the deaths of the late holder of the title, and, in rapid succession, of two cousins, one of whom died in action, become heir to the ancient Barony of Fitz-Herbert. The family solicitors, after ascertaining that Mr FitzHerbert's strange and sudden accession to the headship of his race is perfectly clear, and that no other claimant is in the field, have telegraphed to the editor to come home at once, so that he may take the necessary steps to secure his seat in the House of Lords—"

Lady Ann had listened attentively, but, as was her wont, considered for a few moments.

"How extremely glad I am," she beamed at last. "He was an ill-used man, and a very proud one. I am quite sure he will not be Quixotic, but return to claim his own. I know the place. It is in Suffolk, a moated house, with a courtyard, two Tudor towers, and a rumour of ghosts. What joy for that poor sister who broke her heart over his

departure! How she will skip. over the drawbridge! and he will make that clerical bard, Stone, his private chaplain."

Though she spoke in her habitual satirical vein, her thin, bloodless hands trembled a little, and she waited for Lord Dovedale's expression of delight. She knew he had always believed in Philip, had quarrelled with the dean in regard to his ecclesiastical decision, had never ceased to regret the change which had emptied the church of St Mary's and deprived London of one of its intellectual pioneers. But Lord Dovedale, for once, said very little.

"It is only a newspaper paragraph, and it may not be true."

"Not even if your godmother feels absolutely certain it is true."

And then he gave himself away.

"Think of that man editing a newspaper in Perth for the benefit of the descendants of the convicts! Think of that man, routed out of his pulpit, whence he was weekly speaking burning words for the redemption of the noblest element of the London

world! Think of his humiliation, his desperation, his loss of everything which he prized on earth, and yet I am certain he has worked on for the good of others, as he worked here; he has never ceased to believe in the Almighty's mercy, or the heaven in which such sins as his are wiped away by tears and repentance." He felt ashamed he had said so much. He was essentially a man of the world, and not given to enthusiasm or outbursts of convictions.

"It is a chilling atmosphere," said Lady Ann, "but one member of the gilded chamber seems still to have the fire of youth where friendship is concerned. What will he do after you and someone else have taken him to his seat of glory? Will he take up education, or temperance, or social purity, or the regulation of motor cars?"

"Ah! Lady Ann, you and I know. He will devote himself to the poor and the miserable, and use his wealth for their good. He will, above all things, keep clear of cant,

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and he will believe in humanity, even to the last."

The old lady's eyes glistened. "I must tell Rose quietly to-night when we are alone."

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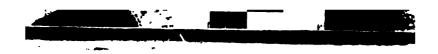
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